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THE WORKS
OF
HENRIK IBSEN

BRAND

TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION BY
C. H. HERFORD, Litt. D., M. A.

PEER GYNT
A Dramatic Poem

TRANSLATED BY
WILLIAM AND CHARLES ARCHER
WITH INTRODUCTION BY
WILLIAM ARCHER

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Translated by C. H. HERFORD

BRAND

BRAND

INTRODUCTION

Brand, "a dramatic poem," was written in the summer of 1865, at Ariccia, near Rome. Fifteen months before, Ibsen had left Christiania, a voluntary exile, eager to escape from the narrow Scandinavian world, and burning with the sense of national disgrace. Denmark was in the throes of the heroic but hopeless struggle to which her northern kinsmen had sent only a handful of volunteers. He had travelled southward, almost within hearing of the Prussian guns; and among the passengers on the steamer was that venerable silver-haired mother who, as his sarcastic verses tell, believed so firmly in the safety of her soldier-son, and with such good ground, "for he was a Norwegian soldier." In Berlin he witnessed the triumphal entry of King William, with the spoils of Dybböl. The visible sign of the humiliation of Denmark symbolised for him the moral abasement of his own country; and this poignant experience set stirring in him the idea of a poem in which the national shame should be mercilessly brought home. This, Ibsen has told us in one of his illuminating letters on the history of the poem, was the germ of *Brand*.[1] But the germ ripened slowly and with difficulty. It had to compete with other literary plans and with new seductions. At Copenhagen he had

[1] *Correspondence*, Letter 74.

already designed a drama on Julian the Apostate; and now, at Rome, the first vivid contact with the ancient world, if it somewhat bewildered his imperfect culture, enthralled his poet's imagination. In September he tells Björnson that he is working out his Julian scheme "with eager delight." [1] But this "rich kingdom," where the dream children of his fancy sported, was invaded from time to time by a sombre guest, at whose coming they fled. Thus he symbolised, in a little poem *From My Home Life*, the interruption of his delightful labours upon Julian, by the urgency of another task, less congenial, but which weighed on him like a nightmare and would not let him go. This was the original, or narrative, *Brand*, first referred to, in the same letter, as "a longish poem."

The epic *Brand*, as it is usually called, is a fragment, or collection of fragments, consisting of some two hundred eight-line stanzas. It was written, with painful but conscientious labour, fluctuating purpose, and increasing dissatisfaction, between September, 1864, and July, 1865. Several cantos were written more than once, in different rhythms. The action corresponds roughly to the first quarter of the drama, but is much more expansive and loosely strung. Narrative was at no time quite natural to Ibsen, and he seems never to have decided whether he was writing a novel in verse with declamatory episodes, or a series of invectives with novelistic filling-in. The boyhood of Brand and Einar (at first called Koll and Axel), and Brand's meeting with Einar and Agnes (Dagmar) on the mountains, and with Gerd, are told with more elaboration and more realism than in the drama,

[1] *Correspondence*, Letter 17.

but with less power. Ibsen had not Chaucer's or Ariosto's art of reconciling matters of fact with a stately and intricate stanza. It is otherwise with the invective passages. For the purpose of chastisement this weightier and more sonorous lyric instrument is more effective than the short, sharp reverberating rhythms of the drama. Two passages of peculiar interest are found in the "Epic" only: the opening lines, vibrating with passion and shame, addressed "to my Accomplices"; and the scornful picture of one of those patriotic meetings at which the men who had failed to answer the cry of their "brother in need," listened to enthusiastic assurances that the blood of the Vikings still ran in their veins. The orator is the quondam protagonist of "Norse" Romanticism, Wergeland; and Ibsen could not have condemned the Romantic faith of his own Bergen days with more emphasis. For the poets, as he bitterly recognised, had misled the nation: they were "accomplices" in its guilt.

> "We have coquetted with a race departed;
> Trick'd out its moulder'd body with false charms,
> Hung Memory's hall with armour and with arms
> To make a pigmy people jocund-hearted:
> Darkling we sang of glories that were gone;
> But one great point—we quite forgot to touch it;
> Ancestral treasure may *he* call his own
> Who has not got a hand wherewith to clutch it?" [1]

Or again, with ironical sarcasm;

> "A people of glorious recollections, this is!
> A people that in ancient days was strong,
> A people of fighting men and fighting misses,—
> When poets have commission for a song;

[1] vv. 34–41.

A people that before no peril blenches,
That shakes its fist against the armed East,
That stands serene before the Southern trenches—
When orators are fervent at a feast." [1]

But in spite of some grand passages, and three fine lyrics, Ibsen rightly judged that he was on a false tack. In July, 1865, the MS. was definitely thrown aside. Its subsequent fate was curious. Deposited, with other papers, when Ibsen left Italy, in the Scandinavian club, at Rome, it found its way into an antiquarian lumber-room there. Thence, in 1896, it was rescued by a Danish collector, A. Pontoppidan, only, however, to be deposited, unexamined, in the private lumber-room of his own curiosity-store; and it was only after his death, in 1901, that his executor, Karl Larsen, at length discovered and disclosed its true nature. Six years later he published it in an exemplary edition.[2]

But if Ibsen abandoned the epic *Brand*, it was only as a runner, catching a glimpse of his goal, might throw off an impeding garment. One day in July, in St. Peter's, there suddenly flashed upon him, in his own words, "a strong and clear form for what I had to say." He immediately threw the futile experiments overboard, and began to write with a freedom and inspiration he had never known. In his seclusion at Ariccia the dramatic *Brand* took shape with amazing swiftness. "It is blessedly peaceful out here," he wrote to Björnson; "I have no acquaintances; and I write both morning and evening, which I never could do before." [3] Already in September

[1] vv. 900–907.
[2] *H. Ibsen's Episke Brand.* Copenhagen, 1907.
[3] *Correspondence*, Letter 20.

the fourth act was finished, and he was confident of finishing the fifth in another eight days. In March, 1866, *Brand*, "a dramatic poem," was published at Copenhagen.

The publisher, Hegel (head of the great Danish house of Gyldendal), to whom Ibsen had been introduced by Björnson, was somewhat sceptical of the success of a verse drama so unusual in style, so long, and so fiercely abusive of those to whom it was addressed. But upon its publication it instantly took the whole Scandinavian world by storm. Four editions appeared before the end of the year, the eleventh in 1889, and the sale is still steady to-day. At Stockholm, in 1885, it was even put upon the stage, for which it was never meant, crowded houses sitting through a performance, fifteen times repeated, which lasted nearly seven hours. Outside Scandinavia, too, the author of *Brand* began to be named; it was the beginning of his European fame. In Germany, particularly, the passionate exaltation and masterful will which pervades it found quick response, after 1870, from a generation which had just watched the colossal shaping of the Empire, and was soon to recognise its secret ideal in the *Übermensch* of Nietzsche. No less than four verse-translations appeared there between 1872 and 1882.

But of the "European" Ibsen of later days there was as yet no trace in the author of *Brand*. It was addressed to Norway, and no small part of the secret both of its vast immediate success and of its enduring spell lay in the peculiar intensity of the bond, mingled of love and scorn, like the anger of Dante, which held him to her. It was a bond which liberated and clarified; which detached him from her provincialisms, and drew him nearer to her

essential life; so that the poem which brought the sternest indictment against his nation was the first which went to its heart. And, not least, it liberated him from the traditional doctrines of poetic art to which he had still painfully clung in the epic *Brand*. "Æsthetics," he wrote to Björnson, "are as great a curse to poetry as theology to religion"; and for motives so complex and original as possessed the poet of *Brand*, assuredly, no æsthetics provided an adequate frame. Throwing theories and systems to the winds, he abandoned himself to the impetuous onrush of his own genius, and produced a poem which belongs to no school and emulates none, but, with a thousand crudities and negligences of detail, compels us, by the ethical and intellectual passion with which it faces the problem of life to think of Goethe's *Faust*, and by the tragic intensity of its greatest moments to think of Shakespeare and the Greeks.

Brand is thus, though it is also a very great deal more, a picture—say rather a grandiose etching, sombre, monotoned, but penetrating and spiritual,—of modern Norway. "Never have I seen the Home and its life so fully, so clearly, so near by," he told the Christiania students in 1873, "as precisely from a distance and in absence."[1] Under the Italian sky, among the myrtles and aloes of the "Paradise of exiles," there arose before him more vividly than ever the vision of the stern and rugged Norwegian landscape, the solemn twilight of the fjord, the storm-swept glacier, the peasant-folk absorbed in the desperate struggle for bread, officialdom absorbed in material progress, "intelligence" growing refined, "humane," and

[1] Speech to the Students, printed in full in Halvorsen, *Norsk Forfatter-lexikon*, art. "Ibsen."

somewhat effeminate; and, emerging here and there, glimpses somewhat futile and forlorn of heroic manhood. A summer tour which he had made among the western fjords in July, 1862, on a commission from Government to collect popular legends, supplied a crowd of vivid local and personal reminiscences; a ruined parsonage under a precipice, a little mouldering church, a wild march across Jotunheim in storm and snow, and then the dizzy plunge down into one of those deep lowland valleys that strike up like huge rocky rifts from the fjord-head into the heart of the mountains.

Not less intimately Norwegian, at bottom, is the imposing figure through whose lips Ibsen thunders at the sins of Norway. His name, meaning "fire" and also "sword," bears the stamp of the heroic age. To every-day Norway he doubtless belongs less than his prototype in the fragment: the epic Brand is more human and less sublime; he still doubts his "call," and the artist Einar proves almost his match in debate: the dramatic Brand is a prophet, "towering as he talks," in the grandeur of burning faith, before which Einar's light-hearted dilettantism helplessly succumbs. "I read nothing but the Bible," wrote Ibsen, at the crisis of the drama; "it is vigorous and strong"; and Hebraic imagery and allusion count for not a little in the speech of Brand. But spiritual fanaticism like his, even prophetic passion like his, had often been approached in the Scandinavian world; and no less than three contemporaries have been confidently pointed to as Ibsen's "model." The Danish critics immediately declared Brand to stand for the Danish apostle of unfaltering will, Sören Kierkegaard. Norway preferred

the Norwegian heretic Lammers. Of late years more interest has attached to the title of one of Ibsen's personal friends, Christopher Bruun,—still living, as a clergyman, at Christiania. Bruun had preached the national duty of fighting for the Danish brothers in need with a passionate eloquence equal to Ibsen's own, and sometimes amazingly like Brand's in thought and phrase: he had, moreover, as Ibsen had not, fought himself as a volunteer in the vain struggle. At the close of the war he went, with his sister Thea, to Rome, and there associated closely for several months with Ibsen. All three—Kierkegaard, Lammers, Bruun—probably contributed details to the history, the circumstances, or the portrait of *Brand*.[1] But the essential stuff of the character came from the nature of Ibsen himself. His clerical profession is, in any case, merely costume. "I could have applied the syllogism just as well," he told Georg Brandes, "to a sculptor, or a politician, as to a priest." Galileo would have served his purpose, "assuming of course that he should stand firm and not concede the fixity of the earth." The essential thing was thus the *standing firm*, the absolute self-surrender to a cause,—a demand applicable to every condition of life; and not least to Ibsen's own struggle, through want and hunger, to fulfil his own call, the All or Nothing of poetry. "Brand is myself in my best moments," he declared to Hansen;[2] and this, though not the whole truth, is the most vital part of it. The

[1] Bruun modestly limits his own contribution to the "wallet" carried by Brand in the first scene: "that wallet, I have Ibsen's own word for it, is the one I carried through the Danish war, and across the Alps, and was very proud of."—Larsen, *Episk. Brand*, p. 247

[2] *Correspondence*, Letter 74.

gist of the whole is therefore ethical, in spite of its theological clothing, and in spite of the theological phraseology in which Ibsen's own ethical conceptions were as yet habitually entangled. The faith which inspires it is the faith in the spirit of man—"the one eternal thing," as Brand declares in a splendid outburst, that of which churches and creeds are only passing moods, and which, now dispersed and disintegrated among the torsos of humanity, shall one day gather once more into a whole.

But Brand's opponents, too, were not drawn wholly from the outside. If Ibsen was at moments Brand, he had in him also, as he very well knew, the making of an Einar,—nay, of a Peer Gynt. The joyous exuberance of the artist was as well known to him as his stern self-suppression; and the creed of glad abandonment to the glory of the hour, which Falk preaches so eloquently in *Love's Comedy*, was also the creed of the enthusiastic, lyric Ibsen whom the Brand in him held in check, and finally crushed out of sight. There are not a few tirades in *Brand* itself, where it might be suspected that Falk or Einar had held the pen. At Bergen, in the fifties, he had made love as lightly as they to the young Henrietta Holst; Einar's art was one of his dreams; and as late as 1860 he still practised at the easel. And it was the Einar in him, not the Brand, who revelled, during the first Roman months, in the "ideal peacefulness" of the life in "the blithe artist-world, to which only the life in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* could be compared." In the Einar of the "Epic" fragment, as we saw, this is still apparent; the artist stands up to the Puritan somewhat as Orlando retorts upon Jacques. But in the drama, where æsthetics

and the deliberate cults of beauty had been fiercely renounced, the artist's life lost the insecure remnant of its prestige; and the "Light-heartedness" which Brand goes forth to conquer, now attenuated and impoverished, is typified by an impoverished and attenuated Einar.

Yet even in the mature drama Ibsen's inner complexity of nature, the still unsolved antinomies of his mind and heart, disturbed the contours of his original scheme. It is not merely that satire and invective pass over into tragedy; that the great crusader who takes up arms against the triple-banded foe has himself to struggle in the grip of his terrible formula, and finally to perish amid the utter ruin of his work. He has simply given All, as his formula required; utter ruin, if called for, was in the bond. To Ibsen himself, when he called on Norway to help the Danes, her practically certain failure was irrelevant; nor is it likely that he would have been moved by the fact, since made known, of the Russian warning to Sweden. Together with all this, however, there is a subtle, probably unconscious, shifting of the moral perspective, a change in the point of view. The beautiful creation of Agnes (who perhaps derives some traits from the winning and gracious personality of Thea Bruun), the comrade first of Einar, then of Brand, shares the joyous nature of the one and the heroism of the other. But both her joyousness and her heroism are permeated and transfigured by love, in which both men are so poor; and as the tragedy deepens to the harrowing pathos of the fourth act, and the pitiable desolation of the fifth, it is Love and no longer Will which seems to have "the laws that are not of yesterday but from eternity" on its side; while the "All or

Nothing," once the wakening cry of a young Herculean God to an effete generation, comes to resemble the blind fanaticism of a solitary man and a passing time. And the final assurance, which rings in his dying ear, that the God in whose name he had crushed Love is the God of Love, stamps him, not as a martyr to his faith, about to receive his due meed, but as one who has sought a noble end with imperfect insight; a tragic hero, for whose fate deep-seated error of his own is in part responsible. But this was not exactly the Brand who was to be the mouthpiece of moral law to an offending people. Open self-contradiction there hardly is; but a shifting of the stress, from Will to Love, is unmistakable. Ibsen loved his country, but love was not the burden of his message to it. Yet the message once delivered, love began to emerge and to reassert itself. An apparently trivial anecdote, which he quietly relates at the close of his account of the genesis of *Brand*, probably lets us in very close to the truth. "While I was writing *Brand* I had, standing on my table, a scorpion in an empty beer glass. Occasionally the creature sickened; then I would give it a bit of ripe fruit, which it threw itself furiously upon and poured its venom into; then it got well again."[1]

Brand is written throughout in one or other of two varieties—iambic and trochaic—of four-beat verse. Instead of being deftly intermingled, as in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, they are kept strictly apart, and used to accentuate the distinction between two types of scene; the iambic being chosen for the more pedestrian and familiar scenes, the trochaic for those more passionate and poetic.

[1] *Correspondence*, Letter 74.

The present translation retains the metres of the original, and follows the text, in general, line for line. But no attempt has been made at exact correspondence in points, such as the use of single or double rhymes, and the sequence and arrangement of rhymes, where the original itself is completely arbitrary.

C. H. H.

BRAND
(1865)

PERSONS REPRESENTED

Brand.
His Mother.
Einar, *a painter.*
Agnes.
The Mayor.
The Doctor.
The Dean.
The Sexton.
The Schoolmaster.
Gerd.
A Peasant.
His Young Son.
Another Peasant.
A Woman.
Another Woman.
A Clerk.
Priests and Officials.
Crowd: Men, Women and Children.
The Tempter in the Desert.
The Invisible Choir.
A Voice.

The action takes place in our own time, at various points around a fjord-hamlet on the west coast of Norway.

BRAND

ACT FIRST

High up in the mountain snowfields. The mist lies thick and close; it is raining, and nearly dark.

BRAND *in black, with stick and wallet, is struggling on westward.* A PEASANT AND HIS YOUNG SON, *who have joined him, are a little way behind.*

THE PEASANT.

[*Calling after* BRAND.]

Hullo, you stranger fellow, stay!
Where are you?

BRAND.

Here!

THE PEASANT.

You've got astray!
The fog's so thick, my sight it passes
To see a staff's-length 'fore or back——

THE SON.

Father, here's clefts!

THE PEASANT.

And here crevasses!

BRAND.

And not a vestige of the track.

THE PEASANT.

[*Crying out.*]

Hold, man! God's death—! The very ground
Is but a shell! Don't stamp the snow!

BRAND.

[*Listening.*]

I hear the roaring of a fall.

THE PEASANT.

A beck has gnawed its way below;
Here's an abyss that none can sound;
'Twill open and engulf us all!

BRAND.

As I have said, I m u s t go on.

THE PEASANT.

That's past the power of any one.
I tell you—the ground's a rotten crust—
Hold, hold, man! Death is where it's trod!

BRAND.

A great one gave me charge; I m u s t.

THE PEASANT.

What is his name?

BRAND.

His name is God.

THE PEASANT.

And what might you be, pray?

BRAND.

A priest.

THE PEASANT.

Maybe; but one thing's clear at least;
Though you were dean and bishop too,
Death will have laid his grip on you
Ere daybreak, if you dare to breast
The glacier's cavern-cloven crest.
[*Approaching warily and insinuatingly.*]
Hark, priest; the wisest, learned'st man
Cannot do more than what he can.
Turn back; don't be so stiff and stout!
A man has but a single life;—
What has he left if t h a t goes out?
The nearest farm is two leagues off,
And for the fog, it's thick enough
To hack at with a hunting-knife.

BRAND.

If the fog's thick, no glimmering ray
Of marsh-light lures our feet astray.

THE PEASANT.

All round lie ice-tarns in a ring,
And an ice-tarn's an ugly thing.

BRAND.

We'll walk across.

THE PEASANT.

On waves you'll walk?
Your deeds will hardly match your talk.

BRAND.

Yet one has proved,—whose faith is sound
May walk dry-footed on the sea.

THE PEASANT.

Yes, men of olden time, maybe;
But nowadays he'd just be drowned.

BRAND.

[*Going.*]

Farewell!

THE PEASANT.

You throw your life away!

BRAND.

If God should haply need its loss,—
Then welcome chasm, and flood, and foss.

THE PEASANT.

[*To himself.*]

Nay, but his wits are gone astray!

THE SON.

[*Half-crying.*]

Come away, Father! see how black
With coming tempest is the wrack!

BRAND.

[*Stopping and approaching again.*]

Hear, peasant; you at first profess'd,
Your daughter by the fjordside lying,
Had sent you word that she was dying,
But could not with a gladsome breast,
Until she saw you, go to rest?

THE PEASANT.

That's certain, as I hope for bliss!

BRAND.

And as her last day mentioned—t h i s ?

THE PEASANT.

Yes.

BRAND.

Not a later?

THE PEASANT.

No.

BRAND.

Then come!

THE PEASANT.

The thing's impossible—turn home

BRAND.

[*Looking fixedly at him.*]

Listen! Would you give twenty pound
If she might have a blest release?

THE PEASANT.

Yes, parson!

BRAND.

Forty?

THE PEASANT.

House and ground
I'd very gladly sign away
If so she might expire in peace!

BRAND.

But would you also give your l i f e?

THE PEASANT.

What? life? My good friend——!

BRAND.

Well?

THE PEASANT.

[*Scratching his head.*]

Nay, nay,
I draw the line somewhere or other——!
In Jesus' name, remember, pray,
At home I've children and a wife.

BRAND.

He whom you mention had a mother.

THE PEASANT.

Ay, that was in the times of yore;—
Then marvels were of every day;
Such things don't happen any more.

BRAND.

Go home. You travel in death's track.
You know not God, God knows not you.

THE PEASANT.

Hoo, you are stern!

THE SON.

[*Pulling him away.*]

Come back! come back!

THE PEASANT.

Ay, ay; but he must follow too!

BRAND.

Must I?

THE PEASANT.

Ay, if I let you bide
Up here in this accursed weather,
And rumour told, what we can't hide,
That you and we set out together,

I'm haul'd some morning to the dock,—
And if you're drown'd in flood and fen,
I'm sentenced to the bolt and lock——

BRAND.

You suffer in God's service, then

THE PEASANT.

Nor his nor yours is my affair;
My own is hard enough to bear.
Come then!

BRAND.

Farewell!
[*A hollow roar is heard in the distance.*

THE SON.

[*Shrieking.*]

An avalanche roar!

BRAND.

[*To the* PEASANT *who has seized his collar.*]
Off!

THE PEASANT.

Nay!

BRAND.

This instant!

THE SON.

Stay no more!

THE PEASANT.

[*Struggling with* BRAND.]

Nay, devil take me——!

BRAND.

[*Shakes him off and throws him down in the snow.*]

That, depend
On it, he will do in the end! [*Goes.*

THE PEASANT.

[*Sitting and rubbing his arm.*]

Ow, ow; his arm's an iron rod;
And that's what he calls serving God!
[*Calling as he gets up.*]
Ho, priest!

THE SON.

He's gone athwart the hill.

THE PEASANT.

Ay, but I see him glimmer still.
[*Calling again.*]
Hear me,—if you remember, say,
Where was it that we lost the way?

BRAND.

[*In the mist.*]

You need no cross to point you right;—
The broad and beaten track you tread.

THE PEASANT.

God grant it were but as he said,
And I'd sit snug at home to-night.

[*He and his Son retire eastwards.*

BRAND.

[*Reappears higher up, and listens in the direction in which the* PEASANT *went.*]

Homeward they grovel! Thou dull thrall,
If but thy feeble flesh were all,
If any spark of living will
Sprang in thee, I had help'd thee still.
With breaking back, and feet way-worn,
Lightly and swift I had thee borne;
But help is idle for the man
Who nothing wills but what he can.

[*Goes further on.*]

Ah life! ah life! Why art thou then
So passing sweet to mortal men?
In every weakling's estimation
His own life does as grossly weigh
As if the load of man's salvation
Upon his puny shoulders lay.
For every burden he's prepared,
God help us,—so his life be spared!

[*Smiles as in recollection.*]

Two thoughts in boyhood broke upon me,
And spasms of laughter in me woke,
And from our ancient school-dame won me
Many a just and bitter stroke.
An Owl I fancied, scared by night;
A Fish that had the water-fright;

I sought to banish them;—in vain,
They clung like leeches to my brain.
Whence rose that laughter in my mind?
Ah, from the gulf, dimly divined,
Between the living world we see
And the world as it ought to be,
Between enduring what we must,
And murmuring, it is unjust!
Ah, whole or sickly, great or small,
Such owls, such fishes, are we all.
Born to be tenants of the deep,
Born to be exiles from the sun,
This, even this, does us appal;
We dash against the beetling steep,
Our starry-vaulted home we shun,
And crying to heaven, bootless pray
For air and the glad flames of day!
[*Pauses a moment, starts, and listens.*]
What do I hear? A sound of singing.
Ay, blended song and laughter ringing.
With now a cheer and now a hollo,—
Another—and another—follow!
Lo, the sun rises; the mist lifts.
Already through the breaking rifts
The illimitable heights I see;
And now that joyous company
Stands out against the morning light
Upon the summit of the height.
Their shadows taper to the west,
Farewells are utter'd, hands are pressed.
And now they part. The others move
Eastward away, two westward wend,
And, waving hats and kerchiefs, send
Their farewell messages of love.

[*The sun gradually breaks through and disperses the mist.* BRAND *stands and looks down on the two as they approach.*]

How the light glitters round these two!
It is as if the mist took flight,
And flowering heather clothed the height,
And heaven laugh'd round them where they go.
Brother and sister, hand in hand,
They spring along the hill together,
She scarcely stirs the dewy heather,
And he is lissome as a wand.
Now she darts back, he rushes after,
Now slips aside, eludes his aim,—
Out of their gambols grows a game——!
And hark, a song out of their laughter!

[EINAR *and* AGNES, *in light summer dress, both of them warm and glowing, come playing across the level. The mist is gone; a bright summer morning lies on the mountains.*]

EINAR.

Agnes, my beautiful butterfly,
Playfully shalt thou be caught!
I am weaving a net, and its meshes fine
Are all of my music wrought!

AGNES.

[*Dancing backwards and always eluding him.*]

And am I a butterfly, dainty and slight,
Let me sip of the heather-bell blue,
And art thou a boy, let me be thy sport,
But oh! not thy captive too!

EINAR.

Agnes, my beautiful butterfly,
I have woven my meshes so thin,
And never availeth thy fluttering flight,
Soon art thou my captive within.

AGNES.

And am I a butterfly young and bright,
Full joyously I can play,
But if in thy net I a captive lie
Oh, touch not my wings, I pray!

EINAR.

Nay, I will lift thee with tender hand,
And lock thee up in my breast,
And there thou shalt play thy whole life long
At the game thy heart loves best.

[*They have unwittingly approached a sheer precipice, and are now close to the edge.*

BRAND.

[*Calls down to them.*]

Hold! hold! You stand by an abyss!

EINAR.

Who calls us?

AGNES.

[*Pointing up.*]

See!

BRAND.

Heed where you go!
Your feet are on the hollow snow
That overhangs a precipice.

EINAR.

[*Clasping her, and laughing up to* BRAND.]

Needless for her and me your fears!

AGNES.

We have a whole life long to play!

EINAR.

In sunshine lies our destined way,
And ends but with a hundred years.

BRAND.

And then you perish? So!

AGNES.

[*Waving her veil.*]

No; then
We fly to heaven and play again!

EINAR.

A hundred years to revel given,
Each night the bridal lamps aflame,—
A century of glorious game——

BRAND.

And then—?

EINAR.

Then home again to heaven,—

BRAND.

Aha! so t h a t is whence you came?

EINAR.

Of course; how should we not come thence?

AGNES.

That is, our very latest flight
Is from the valley, eastward hence.

BRAND.

I think I saw you on the height.

EINAR.

Ay, it was there on those loved faces
Even but now we look'd our last,
And with clasp'd hands, kisses, embraces
Seal'd all our tender memories fast!
Come down to us, and I will tell
How God's been good beyond compare—
And you shall all our gladness share——!
Pooh, stand not like an icicle!
Come, thaw now! There, I like you so.
First, I'm a painter, you must know,
And even this to me was sweet,—
To lend my fancy wings and feet,
In colours to bid life arise,
As He of grubs breeds butterflies.
But God surpass'd himself when He

My Agnes gave me for my bride!
I came from travels over sea,
My painter's satchel at my side——

AGNES.

[*Eagerly.*]

Glad as a king, and fresh, and free,—
And knew a thousand songs beside!

EINAR.

Just as the village I pass'd through,
She chanced to dwell an inmate there.
S h e longed to taste the upland air,
The scented woods, the sun, the dew;
M e God unto the mountains drew,—
My heart cried out: Seek Beauty's might
In forests dim and rivers bright
And flying clouds beneath the blue.—
Then I achieved my height of art:
A rosy flush upon her cheek,
Two joyous eyes that seem'd to speak,
A smile whose music filled the heart—

AGNES.

For you, though, all that art was vain,
You drank life's beaker, blind and rapt,
And then, one sunny morn, again
Stood, staff in hand and baggage strapp'd—

EINAR.

Then suddenly the thought occurr'd:
"Why, friend, the wooing is forgot!"

Hurrah! I ask'd, she gave her word,
And all was settled on the spot.
Our good old doctor, like a boy,
Was all beside himself with joy;
So three whole days, and whole nights three,
Held revelry for her and me;
Mayor and constable, clerk and priest,—
All the grown youth was at the feast.
Last night we left, but not for that
The revel or the banquet ceased;
With banner'd pole and wreathed hat,
Up over bank, on over brae,
Our comrades brought us on our way.

AGNES.

The mountain-side we danced along,
In couples now, and now in groups,—

EINAR.

Drank luscious wine from silver stoups,—

AGNES.

Awoke the summer night with song,—

EINAR.

And the thick mist before our feet
Beat an obsequious retreat.

BRAND.

And now your way lies—?

EINAR.

To the town
Before us.

AGNES.

To my parents' home.

EINAR.

First over yonder peak, then down
To the fjord haven in the west;
On Egir's courser through the foam
Ride homeward to the bridal feast,—
So to the sunny south together
Like paired swans in their first flight——

BRAND.

And there——?

EINAR.

A life of summer weather,
A dream, a legend of delight.
For on this Sabbath morn have we,
High on the hills, without a priest,
From fear and sorrow been released
And consecrated to gaiety.

BRAND.

By whom?

EINAR.

By all the merry crowd.
With ringing glasses every cloud
Was banish'd that might dash the leaves
Too rudely at our cottage eaves.
Out of our speech they put to flight
Each warning word of stormy showers,
And hail'd us, garlanded with flowers,
The true-born children of Delight.

BRAND.

[*Going.*]

Farewell, ye two.

EINAR.

[*Starting and looking more closely at him.*]

I pray you, hold!
Something familiar in your face——

BRAND.

[*Coldly.*]

I am a stranger.

EINAR.

Yet a trace
Surely there lingers of an old
Friend of my school-days—

BRAND.

School-friends, true;
But now I am no more a boy.

EINAR.

Can it be——?

[*Cries out suddenly.*]

Brand! It is! O joy!

BRAND.

From the first moment I knew y o u.

EINAR.

Well met! a thousand times well met!
Look at me!—Ay, the old Brand yet,

Still centred on the things within,
Whom never any one could win
To join our gambols.

BRAND.

You forget
That I was homeless and alone.
Yet you at least I loved, I own.
You children of the southern land
Were fashion'd of another clay
Than I, born by a rocky strand
In shadow of a barren brae.

EINAR.

Your home is here, I think?

BRAND.

My way
Lies past it.

EINAR.

Past? What, further?

BRAND.

Far
Beyond, beyond my home.

EINAR.

You are
A priest?

BRAND.

[*Smiling.*]

A mission-preacher, say.
I wander like the woodland hare,
And where I am, my home is there.

EINAR.

And whither is your last resort?

BRAND.

[*Sternly and quickly.*]

Inquire not!

EINAR.

Wherefore?

BRAND.

[*Changing his tone.*]

Ah,—then know,
The ship that stays for you below
Shall bear me also from the port.

EINAR.

Hurrah! My bridal-courser true!
Think, Agnes, he is coming too!

BRAND.

But *I* am to a burial bound.

AGNES.

A b u r i a l.

EINAR.

You? Why, who is dead?

BRAND.

The God who was y o u r God, you said.

AGNES.

[*Shrinking back.*]

Come, Einar!

EINAR.

Brand!

BRAND.

With cerements wound
The God of each mechanic slave,
Of each dull drudger, shall be laid
By broad day in his open grave.
End of the matter must be made;
And high time is it you should know
He ail'd a thousand years ago.

EINAR.

Brand, you are ill!

BRAND.

No, sound and fresh
As juniper and mountain-pine!
It is our age whose pining flesh
Craves burial at these hands of mine.
Ye will but laugh and love and play,
A little doctrine take on trust,
And all the bitter burden thrust
On One who came, ye have been told,
And from your shoulders took away
Your great transgressions manifold.
He bore for you the cross, the lance—
Ye therefore have full leave to dance;
Dance then,—but where your dancing ends
Is quite another thing, my friends!

EINAR.

Ah, I perceive, the latest cry,
That folks are so much taken by.
You come of the new brood, who hold
That life is only gilded mould,
And with God's penal fires and flashes
Hound all the world to sack and ashes.

BRAND.

No, I am no "Evangelist,"
I speak not as the Church's priest;
That I'm a Christian, even, I doubt;
That I'm a man, though, I know well,
And that I see the cancer fell
That eats our country's marrow out.

EINAR.

[*Smiling.*]

I never heard, I must confess,
Our country taxed with being given
To worldly pleasure in excess!

BRAND.

No, by delight no breast is riven;—
Were it but so, the ill were less!
Be passion's slave, be pleasure's thrall,—
But be it utterly, all in all!
Be not to-day, to-morrow, one,
Another when a year is gone;
Be what you are with all your heart,
And not by pieces and in part.

The Bacchant's clear, defined, complete,
The sot, his sordid counterfeit;
Silenus charms; but all his graces
The drunkard's parody debases.
Traverse the land from beach to beach,
Try every man in heart and soul,
You'll find he has no virtue whole,
But just a little grain of each.
A little pious in the pew,
A little grave,—his fathers' way,—
Over the cup a little gay,—
It was his father's fashion too!
A little warm when glasses clash,
And stormy cheer and song go round
For the small Folk, rock-will'd, rock-bound,
That never stood the scourge and lash.
A little free in promise-making;
And then, when vows in liquor will'd
Must be in mortal stress fulfill'd,
A little fine in promise-breaking.
Yet, as I say, all fragments still,
His faults, his merits, fragments all,
Partial in good, partial in ill,
Partial in great things and in small;—
But here's the grief—that, worst or best,
Each fragment of him wrecks the rest!

EINAR.

Scoffing's an easy task: it were
A nobler policy to spare——

BRAND.

Perhaps, if it were wholesome too.

EINAR.

Well, well, the indictment I endorse
With all my heart; but can't divine
What in the world it has to do
With Him, the God you count a corse,
Whom yet I still acknowledge mine.

BRAND.

My genial friend, your gift is Art;—
Show me the God you have averr'd.
Him you have painted, I have heard,
And touch'd the honest people's heart.
Old is he haply; am I right?

EINAR.

Well, yes——

BRAND.

Of course; and, doubtless, white?
Hairs straggling on a reverend head,
A beard of ice or silver-thread;
Kindly, yet stern enough to fright
A pack of children in the night.
I will not ask you, if your God
With fireside slippers you have shod;
But 'twere a pity, without doubt,
To leave skull-cap and glasses out.

EINAR.

[*Angrily.*]

What do you mean?

BRAND.

I do not flout;
Just so he looks in form and face,
The household idol of our race.
As Catholics make of the Redeemer
A baby at the breast, so ye
Make God a dotard and a dreamer,
Verging on second infancy.
And as the Pope on Peter's throne
Calls little but his keys his own,
So to the Church you would confine
The world-wide realm of the Divine;
'Twixt Life and Doctrine set a sea,
Nowise concern yourselves to b e ;
Bliss for your souls ye would receive,
Not utterly and wholly l i v e ;
Ye need, such feebleness to brook,
A God who'll through his fingers look,
Who, like yourselves, is hoary grown,
And keeps a cap for his bald crown.'
Mine is another kind of God!
Mine is a storm, where thine's a lull,
Implacable where thine's a clod,
All-loving there, where thine is dull;
And He is young like Hercules,
No hoary sipper of life's lees!
His voice rang through the dazzled night
When He, within the burning wood,
By Moses upon Horeb's height
As by a pigmy's pigmy stood.
In Gibeon's vale He stay'd the sun,
And wonders without end has done,
And wonders without end would do,
Were not the age grown sick,—like you!

EINAR.

[*Smiling faintly.*]

And now the age shall be made whole?

BRAND.

It shall, I say, and that as sure
As that I came to earth to cure
The sapping fester of its soul.

EINAR.

[*Shaking his head.*]

Ere yet the radiant torchlight blazes,
Throw not the taper to the ground!
Nor blot the antiquated phrases
Before the great new words be found!

BRAND.

Nothing that's new do I demand;
For Everlasting Right I stand.
It is not for a Church I cry,
It is not dogmas I defend;
Day dawn'd on both, and, possibly,
Day may on both of them descend.
What's made has "finis" for its brand;
Of moth and worm it feels the flaw,
And then, by nature and by law,
Is for an embryo thrust aside.
But there is one that shall abide;—
The Spirit, that was never born,
That in the world's fresh gladsome Morn
Was rescued when it seem'd forlorn,
That built with valiant faith a road

Whereby from Flesh it climb'd to God.
Now but in shreds and scraps is dealt
The Spirit we have faintly felt;
But from these scraps and from these shreds,
These headless hands and handless heads,
These torso-stumps of soul and thought,
A Man complete and whole shall grow,
And God His glorious child shall know,
His heir, the Adam that He wrought!

EINAR.

[*Breaking off.*]

Farewell. I judge that it were best
We parted.

BRAND.

You are going west,
I northward. To the fjord from here
Two pathways lead,—both alike near.
Farewell!

EINAR.

Farewell.

BRAND.

[*Turning round again.*]

Light learn to part
From vapour.—Know that Life's an art!

EINAR.

[*Waving him off.*]

Go, turn the universe upside down;
Still in my ancient God I trust!

BRAND.

Good; paint his crutches and his crown,—
I go to lay him in the dust!
[*Disappears over the pass.*

[EINAR *goes silently to the edge and looks after him.*]

AGNES.

[*Stands a moment lost in thought; then starts, looks about her uneasily, and asks.*]

Is the sun set already?

EINAR.

Nay,
A shadowing cloud; and now 'tis past.

AGNES.

The wind is cold!

EINAR.

Only a blast
That hurried by. Here lies our way.

AGNES.

Yon mountain southward, sure, till now,
Wore not that black and beetling brow.

EINAR.

Thou saw'st it not for game and glee
Ere with his cry he startled thee.
Let him pursue his toilsome track,
And we will to our gambols back!

AGNES.

No, now I'm weary.

EINAR.

And indeed
I'm weary too, to tell the truth,—
And here our footing asks more heed
Than on yon upland broad and smooth.
But once we're on the level plain
We'll dance defiantly once more,
Ay, in a tenfold wilder vein
And tenfold swifter than before.
See, Agnes, yon blue line that sparkles,
Fresh from the young sun's morning kiss,
And now it dimples and now darkles,
Silver one moment, amber this;
It is the ocean glad and free
That in the distance thou dost see.
And seest thou the smoky track
In endless line to leeward spread?
And seest thou the point of black
Just rounding now the furthest head?
It is the steamer—thine and mine—
And now it speeds into the fjord,
Then out into the foaming brine
To-night with thee and me on board!—
The mists have veil'd the mountain brow—
Saw'st thou how vividly, but now,
Heaven's image in the water woke!

AGNES.

[*Looking absently about her.*]

Oh, yes. But tell me—sawest thou——?

EINAR.

What?

AGNES.

[*In a hushed voice, without looking at him.*]
How he tower'd as he spoke?

[*She goes down over the pass,* EINAR *follows.*

[*A path along the crags, with a wild valley beyond to the right. Above, and beyond the mountain, are glimpses of greater heights, with peaks and snow.*]

BRAND.

[*Comes up along the path, descends, stops half-way upon a jutting crag, and gazes into the valley.*]

Yes, I know myself once more!
Every boat-house by the shore,
Every home; the landslip-fall,
And the inlet's fringe of birch,
And the ancient, moulder'd church,
And the river alders, all
From my boyhood I recall.
But methinks it all has grown
Grayer, smaller than I knew;
Yon snow-cornice hangs more prone
Than of old it used to do,
From that scanty heaven encloses
Yet another strip of blue,
Beetles, looms, immures, imposes—
Steals of light a larger due.
[*Sits down and gazes into the distance.*]
And the fjord too. Crouch'd it then
In so drear and deep a den?

'Tis a squall. A square-rigg'd skiff
Scuds before it to the land.
Southward, shadow'd by the cliff,
I descry a wharf, a shed,
Then, a farm-house, painted red.—
'Tis the farm beside the strand!
'Tis the widow's farm. The home
Of my childhood. Thronging come
Memories born of memories dead.
I, where yonder breakers roll,
Grew, a lonely infant-soul.
Like a nightmare on my heart
Weighs the burden of my birth,
Knit to one, who walks apart
With her spirit set to earth.
All the high emprise that stirr'd
In me, now is veil'd and blurr'd.
Force and valour from me fail,
Heart and soul grow faint and frail;
As I near my home, I change,
To my very self grow strange—
Wake, as baffled Samson woke,
Shorn and fetter'd, tamed and broke.
[*Looks again down into the valley.*]
What is stirring down below?
Out of every garth they flow,
Troops of children, wives and men,
And in long lines meet and mingle,
Now among the rocks and shingle
Vanish, now emerge again;—
To the ancient Church they go.
[*Rises.*]
Oh, I know you, through and through!
Sluggard spirits, souls of lead!

All the Lord's Prayer, said by you,
Is not with such anguish sped,
By such passion borne on high,
That one tittle thrills the sky
As a ringing human cry,
Save the prayer for daily bread!
That's this people's battle-call,
That's the blazon of them all!
From its context pluck'd apart,
Branded deep in every heart—
There it lies, the tempest-tost
Wreckage of the Faith you've lost
Forth! out of this stifling pit!
Vault-like is the air of it!
Not a Flag may float unfurl'd
In this dead and windless world!

[*He is going; a stone is thrown from above and rolls down the slope close by him.*

BRAND.

[*Calling upward.*]

Ha! who throws stones there?

GERD.

[*A girl of fifteen, running along the crest with stones in her apron.*]

Ho! Good aim!
He screams!

[*She throws again.*]

BRAND.

Hullo, child, stop that game!

GERD.

Without a hurt he's sitting now,
And swinging on a wind-swept bough!
[*She throws again and screams.*]
Now fierce as ever he's making for me.
Help! Hoo! With claws he'll rend and gore me.

BRAND.

In the Lord's name——!

GERD.

Whist! who are you?
Hold still, hold still; he's flying.

BRAND.

Who?

GERD.

Didn't you see the falcon fly?

BRAND.

Here? No.

GERD.

The laidly fowl with crest
Thwart on its sloping brow depress'd,
And red-and-yellow-circled eye.

BRAND.

Which is your way?

GERD.

To church I go.

BRAND.

Then we can go along together.

GERD.

[*Pointing upward.*]

We? But the way I'm bound is thither.

BRAND.

[*Pointing downward.*]

But yonder is the church, you know!

GERD.

[*Pointing downward with a scornful smile.*]

That yonder?

BRAND.

Truly; come with me.

GERD.

No; yon is ugly.

BRAND.

Ugly? Why?

GERD.

Because it's small.

BRAND.

Where did you see
A greater?

GERD.

I could tell you, I.
Farewell. [*She turns away upwards.*

BRAND.

Lies t h e r e that church of yours?
Why, that way leads but to the moors.

GERD.

Come with me, you; I've got to show
A church that's built of ice and snow!

BRAND.

Of ice and snow! I see the truth!
There, amid peak and precipice
As I remember from my youth,
There yawns a cavernous abyss;
"Ice-church" they call'd the place of old;
And of it many a tale was told;
A frozen tarn has paved the floor;
Aloft, in massy-piled blocks,
The gather'd snow-drifts slope and soar
Arch-like over the yawning rocks.

GERD.

It seems a mountain cleft,—ah, yes,
It is a church, though, none the less.

BRAND.

Never go there; a sudden gust
Has often crack'd that hollow crust;
A rifle shot, a scream, a whoop——

GERD.

[*Without listening to him.*]

Just come and see a reindeer troop
Gulf'd in the fall, and never found
Till spring and the great thaw came round.

BRAND.

Yonder is danger; go not near it!

GERD.

[*Pointing down.*]

Yonder is foulness; thou must fear it!

BRAND.

God's peace with you!

GERD.

Nay, this way pass!
Yonder the cataract's singing Mass;
There on the crags the whistling weather
Preaches you hot and cold together.
Thither the hawk will ne'er steal in;
Down, down he sweeps from Svartetind,—
Yonder he sits, the ugly block,
Like my church-steeple's weathercock.

BRAND.

Wild is thy way, and wild thy soul,—
A cittern with a shatter'd bowl.
Of dulness dulness is the brood,—
But evil's lightly won to good.

GERD.

With whirring wings I hear him come!
I'll e'en make shift to get me home!
In yonder church I'm safe,—farewell;
He's on me,—hoo, how fierce and fell!
[*She screams.*]
I'll throw a stone. No nearer, now!
If thou hast talons, I've a bough!
[*She runs off up the mountain.*

BRAND.

[*After a pause.*]

This was a church-goer, like the rest.
Mountain- or Dale-church, which is best?
Which wildest reel, which blindest grope,
Which furthest roam from home and hope:—
L i g h t - h e a r t who, crown'd with leafage gay,
Loves by the dizziest verge to play,—
F a i n t - h e a r t, who marches slack and slow,
Because old Wont will have it so;—
W i l d - h e a r t, who, borne on lawless wings,
Sees fairness in the foulest things?
War front and rear, war high and low,
With this fell triple-banded foe!
I see my Call! It gleams ahead
Like sunshine through a loop-hole shed!
I know my task; these demons slain,
The sick Earth shall grow sound again;—
Once let them to the grave be given,
The fever-fumes of Earth shall fly!
Up, Soul, array thee! Sword from thigh!
To battle for the heirs of heaven!
[*He descends to the hamlet.*

ACT SECOND

By the fjord-side, steep precipices all around. The ancient and tumble-down church stands on a little knoll hard by. A storm is coming on.

The country-folk,—men, women, and children,—are gathered in knots, some on the shore, some on the slopes. The MAYOR *sits in the midst, on a stone; a* CLERK *is helping him; corn and provisions are being distributed.* EINAR *and* AGNES *stand surrounded by a crowd, a little apart. Some boats lie on the beach.* BRAND *comes forward, unnoticed, to the church-knoll.*

A MAN.

[*Breaking through the crowd.*]

Out of the way!

A WOMAN.

I'm first!

THE MAN.

[*Thrusting her aside.*]

Get back!

[*Pushing towards the* MAYOR.]

Ho! look you, fill me up my sack!

THE MAYOR.

All in good time.

THE MAN.

I cannot stay;—
I've four—five—babes of bread bereft!

THE MAYOR.

[*Facetiously.*]

You don't know just how many, eh?

THE MAN.

One was e'en dying when I left.

THE MAYOR.

Hold. You are enter'd, are you not?
[*Examines his papers.*]
No. Yes, you are though. Well for you.
[*To the* CLERK.]
Give Number Twenty-nine his lot.
Come, come, good folks, be patient, do!
Nils Snemyr?

A MAN.

Ay, ay!

THE MAYOR.

We must pare
A quarter off your former share.
You're fewer now, you know.

THE MAN.

Yes, yes,—
My Ragnhild died yestreen.

THE MAYOR.

[*Making a note.*]

One less.
Saving is saving, howsoe'er.

[*To the* MAN, *who is retiring.*]

But look you, now, you needn't run
And marry another on the spot!

CLERK.

[*Sniggering.*]

Hee, hee!

THE MAYOR.

[*Sharply.*]

You laugh?

CLERK.

Your Worship's fun
Is irresistible.

THE MAYOR.

Have done!
This work's no jesting; but the best
Method with mourners is a jest.

EINAR.

[*Coming out of the throng with* AGNES.]

Now my last pocket's clean and bare,
Spent every stiver, every note;—
A very beggar I go afloat,
And pawn my watch to pay my fare!

THE MAYOR.

Yes, in good time you came along.
What I've collected is a song,—
By no means answers to the call
When needy hand and mouth ill-fed
Must halve the sharing of shared bread
With those who've ne'er a bit at all.

[*He perceives* BRAND, *and points up to him.*]

One more! You're welcome. If report
Of our drought-flood-and-famine curse
Has reach'd you, promptly loose your purse
(If yet unloosen'd). Every sort
Of contribution meets the case.
Our store's nigh spent. Five fishes scant
In the wide wilderness of Want
Don't make a square meal nowadays.

BRAND.

Myriads, idolatrously given,
Would lift the soul no nearer heaven.

THE MAYOR.

It was not words I bade you share:
They're barren when the belly's bare.

EINAR.

I can't believe that you recall
What long and fierce calamities
They've suffered:—famine, drought, disease.
Men die, Brand——

BRAND.

I perceive it all.
Each livid-circled eye makes clear
Who it is holds assizes here.

THE MAYOR.

Yet there you stand, a very flint!

BRAND.

If life here ran its sluggish round
Of common toil and common stint,
Pity with me your pangs had found.
Who homeward crawls with earth-set eyes,
In him the sleeping beast will rise.
When days in drowsy calm go by,
Like funerals, at walking pace,
You well may fear that the Most High
Has struck you from His Book of Grace.
But unto you He was more good,
He scatter'd terror in your blood,
He scourged you with the rods that slay,
The gifts He gave, He took away——

VOICES.

[*Fiercely interrupting him.*]

He mocks us in our bitter need!

THE MAYOR.

He rails at us who tend and feed!

BRAND.

[*Shaking his head.*]

Oh, if the blood of all my heart
Could heal you from the hunger-smart,
In welling streams it should be shed,
Till every vein was a dry bed.
But here it were a sin to give!
God seeks to pluck you from your bane;—
Nations, though poor and sparse, that l i v e ,
Suck might and marrow from their pain.
The purblind sight takes falcon-wings,
Sees clear into the heart of things,
The faltering will stands stout at bay,
And sees the triumph through the fray.
But men whom misery has not mann'd
Are worthless of the saving hand!

A WOMAN.

Yonder a storm breaks on the fjord,
As if awaken'd by his word!

ANOTHER WOMAN.

He tempts God! Mark what I foretell!

BRAND.

Y o u r God ne'er wrought a miracle!

WOMEN

See, see! the storm!

VOICES AMONG THE THRONG.

Stab,—stone him! chase
The flinty fellow from the place!

[*The Peasants close menacingly round* BRAND. *The* MAYOR *intervenes.* A WOMAN, *wild and dishevelled, comes hurriedly down the slopes.*

THE WOMAN.

[*Crying out towards the throng.*]

Oh, where is help, for Jesus' grace!

THE MAYOR.

What do you need? Explain your case.

THE WOMAN.

Nothing I need; no alms I seek,
But oh, the horror, horror——

THE MAYOR.

Speak!

THE WOMAN.

I have no voice,—O comfort, aid!
Where is the priest?

THE MAYOR.

Here there is none—

THE WOMAN.

I am undone! I am undone!
Stern wast thou, God, when I was made!

BRAND.

[*Approaching.*]

Maybe, however, there is o n e.

THE WOMAN.

[*Seizing his arm.*]

Then let him come, and swiftly!

BRAND.

Tell

Your need, and he will surely come.

THE WOMAN.

Across the fjord—my husband——

BRAND.

Well?

THE WOMAN.

Three starving babes, and ne'er a crumb,——
Say no,—he is not sent to hell!

BRAND.

Your story first.

THE WOMAN.

My breast was dry;
Man sent no help, and God was dumb;
My babe was dying in agony;
Cut to the heart,—his child he slew!—

BRAND.

He slew——!

THE THRONG.

[*Shuddering.*]

His child!

THE WOMAN.

At once he knew
The horror of his deed of blood!
His grief ran brimming like a flood;
He struck himself the death-wound too.
Come, save him, save him from perdition,
Spite of wild water and wild sky!
He cannot live, and dare not die!
There lies he, clasping the dead frame,
And shrieking on the Devil's name!

BRAND.

[*Quietly.*]

Yes, h e r e is need.

EINAR.

[*Pale.*]

Great God on high!

THE MAYOR.

He doesn't live in my Division.

BRAND.

[*Curtly, to the Peasants.*]

Unmoor a boat and row me there!

A Man.

When such a storm is up? Who dare?

The Mayor.

A path goes round the fjord——

The Woman.

Nay, nay,
There's now no practicable way;
The footbridge as I came across
Was broken by the foaming foss.

Brand.

Unmoor the boat.

A Man.

It can't be done;
O'er rock and reef the breakers run.

Another.

Down sweeps a blast! See, at a stroke
The whole fjord vanishes in smoke!

A Third.

With waves so wild and wind so rough,
The Dean would put the service off.

Brand.

A sinful soul that nears its end
Waits not until the weather mend!
[*Goes down to a boat and looses the sail.*]
You'll risk the boat?

THE OWNER.

I will; but stay!

BRAND.

Now, who will risk his l i f e, I say?

A MAN.

I'll not go with him.

ANOTHER.

No, nor I.

SEVERAL.

It were just putting out to die!

BRAND.

Y o u r God helps none across the fjord;
Remember, though, that m i n e ' s on board!

THE WOMAN.

[*Wringing her hands.*]

He'll die unsaved!

BRAND.

[*Calling from the boat.*]

O n e will avail
To bail the leakage, shift the sail;
Come, one of you that lately gave;
Give now to death and to the grave!

SEVERAL.

[*Shrinking back.*]

Never ask such-like of us!

ONE.

[*Menacingly.*]

Land!
'Tis overbold to tempt God's hand!

SEVERAL VOICES.

See, the storm thickens!

OTHERS.

The ropes break!

BRAND.

[*Holding himself fast with the boat-hook, and calling to the strange* WOMAN.]

Good; come then you; but speedily!

THE WOMAN.

[*Shrinking back.*]

I! Where no others——!

BRAND.

Let them be!

THE WOMAN.

I cannot!

BRAND.

Cannot?

THE WOMAN

My babes' sake——!

BRAND.

[*Scornfully laughing.*]

You build upon a quaking sand!

AGNES.

[*Turns with glowing cheeks to* EINAR, *lays her hand on his arm, and says:*]

Did you hear all?

EINAR.

A valiant heart.

AGNES.

Thank God, Einar, you see your part!

[*Calls to* BRAND.]

See,—here is one man, brave and true,
To go the saving way with you!

BRAND.

Come on then!

EINAR.

[*Pale.*]

I!

AGNES.

I give you! Go!
Mine eyes are lifted, that were low!

EINAR.

Ere I found you, with willing feet
I would have follow'd where he led——

AGNES.

[*Trembling.*]

But now——!

EINAR.

My life is new and sweet;—
I cannot go!

AGNES.

[*Starting back.*]

What have you said!

EINAR.

I dare not go!

AGNES.

[*With a cry.*]

Now roars a sea
Of sweeping flood and surging foam
World-wide, world-deep, 'twixt you and me

[*To* BRAND.]

I will go with you!

BRAND.

Good; then come!

EINAR.

[*Clutching desperately after her.*]

Agnes!

THE WHOLE THRONG.

[*Hurrying towards her.*]

Come back! Come back!

WOMEN.

[*In terror as she springs into the boat.*]

Help, Lord!

BRAND.

Where does the house lie?

WOMEN.

[*Pointing.*]

By the fjord,
Behind yon black and jutting brink!

[*The boats put out.*

EINAR.

[*Calling after them.*]

Your home, your mother, Agnes! Think!
O save yourself!

AGNES.

We are t h r e e on board!

[*The boat sails. The people crowd together on the slopes, and watch in eager suspense.*]

A MAN.

He clears the headland!

ANOTHER.

Nay!

THE FIRST.

Yes, see,—
Astern he has it, and in lee!

ANOTHER.

A squall! It's caught them!

THE MAYOR.

Look at that,—
The wind has swept away his hat!

A WOMAN.

Black as a rook's wing, his wet hair
Streams backward on the angry air.

FIRST MAN.

All seethes and surges!

EINAR.

What a yell!
Rang through the storm!

A WOMAN.

'Twas from the fell.

ANOTHER.

[*Pointing up.*]

See, there stands Gerd upon the cliff,
Hallooing at the passing skiff!

FIRST WOMAN.

She's flinging pebbles like witch-corn,
And blowing through a twisted horn.

SECOND WOMAN.

Now she has slung it like a wand,
And pipes upon her hollow'd hand.

A MAN.

Ay, pipe away, thou troll abhorr'd!
He has a Guide and Guard on board!

ANOTHER.

In a worse storm, with him to steer,
I'd put to sea and never fear.

FIRST MAN.

[*To* EINAR.]

What is he?

EINAR.

A priest.

SECOND MAN.

What is he, nay—
That's plain: he is a m a n, I say!
Strong will is in him, and bold deed.

FIRST MAN.

T h a t were the very priest we need!

MANY VOICES.

Ay, ay, the very priest we need!

[*They disperse along the slopes.*

THE MAYOR.

[*Collecting his books and papers.*]

Well, 'tis opposed to all routine
To labour in a strange vocation,
Intrusively to risk one's skin
Without an adequate occasion.—
I do my duty with precision,—
But always in my own Division. [*Goes.*

[*Outside the hut on the Ness. Late afternoon. The fjord is smooth and gleaming.* AGNES *is sitting by the beach. Presently* BRAND *comes out of the hut.*]

BRAND.

That was death. The horror-rifted
Bosom at its touch grew whole.
Now he looks a calm great soul,
All illumined and uplifted.
Has a false illusion might
Out of gloom to win such light?
Of his devil's-deed he saw
Nothing but the outward flaw,—
That of it which tongue can tell
And to hands is palpable,—
That for which his name's reviled,—
The brute slaying of his child.
But those two, that sat and gazed
With great frighten'd eyes, amazed,
Speechless, like two closely couching
Birdlets, in the ingle crouching,—
Who but look'd, and look'd, and ever
Look'd, unwitting upon what,—

In whose souls a poison-spot
Bit and sank, which they shall never
Even as old men bent and gray,
In Time's turmoil wear away,—
They, whose tide of life proceeds
From this fountain of affright,
Who by dark and dreadful deeds
Must be nurtured into light,
Nor by any purging flames
May that carrion thought consume,—
This he saw not, being blind,
That the direst of the doom
Was the doom he left behind.
And from them shall haply rise
Link'd offences one by one.
Wherefore? The abyss replies:
From the father sprang the son!
What shall be by Love erased?
What be quietly effaced?
Where, O where, does guilt begin
In our heritage of sin?
What Assizes, what Assessors,
When that Judgment is declared?
Who shall question, who be heard,
Where we're all alike transgressors?
Who will venture then to plead
His foul-borrow'd title-deed?
Will the old answer profit yet:
"From my father dates my debt?"
O, abysmal as the night,
Riddle, who can read thee right!
But the people dance light-footed,
Heedless by the dizzy brink;
Where the soul should cry and shrink,

None has vision to perceive
What uptowering guilt is rooted
In that little word: W e l i v e.

[*Some men of the community come from behind the house and approach* BRAND.]

A MAN.

We were to meet again, you see.

BRAND.

His need of human help has ceased.

THE MAN.

Yes; he is ransom'd and released;
But in the chamber still sit three.

BRAND.

And what then?

THE MAN.

Of the scraps we got
Together, a few crumbs we've brought——

BRAND.

Though you give a l l, and life retain,
I tell you that your gift is vain.

THE MAN.

Had he to-day, who now lies dead,
By mortal peril been bested,
And I had heard his foundering cry,
I also would have dared to die.

BRAND.

But peril of the S o u l you slight?

THE MAN.

Well, we're but drudgers day by day.

BRAND.

Then from the downward-streaming light
Turn your eyes utterly away;
And cease to cast the left askance
At heaven, while with the right you glance
Down at the mould where, crouching low,
Self-harness'd in the yoke you go.

THE MAN.

I thought you'd say we ought to shake us
Free of the yoke we toil in?

BRAND.

Yea,
If you are able.

THE MAN.

You can make us!

BRAND.

Can I?

THE MAN.

Full many have been sent
Who told us truly of the way;
The path they pointed to, you w e n t.

BRAND.

You mean——?

THE MAN.

A thousand speeches brand
Less deeply than one dint of deed.
Here in our fellows' name we stand;—
We see, a m a n is what we need.

BRAND.

[*Uneasily.*]

What will you with me?

THE MAN.

Be our priest.

BRAND.

I? Here!

THE MAN.

You've maybe heard it told,
There is no pastor for this fold.

BRAND.

Yes; I recall

THE MAN.

The place of old
Was large, which now is of the least.
When evil seasons froze the field,
And blight on herd and herdsman fell,
When want struck down the Man, and seal'd

The Spirit with its drowsing spell,
When there was dearth of beef and brew,—
T h e n came a dearth of parsons too.

BRAND.

Aught else: but this ye must not ask!
I'm summoned to a greater task.
The great world's open ear I seek;
Through Life's vast organ I must speak.
What should I here? By mountains pent
The voice of man falls impotent.

THE MAN.

By mountains echoed, longer heard
Is each reverberating word.

BRAND.

Who in a cavern would be bound,
When broad meads beckon all around?
Who'll sweat to plough the barren land
When there are fruitful fields at hand?
Who'll rear his fruitage from the seed
When orchards ripen to the skies?
Who'll struggle on with daily need
When vision gives him wings and eyes?

THE MAN.

[*Shaking his head.*]

Your deed I fathom'd,—not your word.

BRAND.

[*Going.*]

Question no more! On board! on board!

THE MAN.

[*Barring his way.*]

This calling that you must fulfil,
This work, whereon you've set your will,
Is it so precious to you, say?

BRAND.

It is my very life!

THE MAN.

Then stay!
[*Pointedly.*]
"Though you give all and life retain,
Remember, that your gift is vain."

BRAND.

O n e thing is yours you may not spend,
Your very inmost Self of all.
You may not bind it, may not bend,
Nor stem the river of your call.
To make for ocean is its end.

THE MAN.

Though tarn and moorland held it fast,—
As dew 'twould reach the sea at last.

BRAND.

[*Looking fixedly at him.*]

Who gave you power to answer thus?

THE MAN.

You, by your deed, y o u gave it us.
When wind and water raged and roar'd,

And you launch'd out through wind and wave,
When, a poor sinning soul to save,
You set your life upon a board,
Deep into many a heart it fell,
Like wind and sunshine, cold and hot,
Rang through them like a chiming bell,—
[*With lowered voice.*]
To-morrow, haply, all's forgot,
And furl'd the kindling banner bright
You just now lifted in our sight.

BRAND.

Duty is not, where power is not.
[*Sternly.*]
If you cannot be what you ought,
Be in good earnest what you may;
Be heart and soul a man of clay.

THE MAN.

[*After gazing on him a moment.*]

Woe! you, who quench the lamp you lit;
And us, who had a glimpse of it!
[*He goes; the others silently follow.*

BRAND.

[*After long watching them.*]

Homewards, one by one, with flagging
Spirits, heavily and slow,
Foreheads bowed, and weary lagging
Footsteps, silently they go.
Each with sorrow in his eyes,
Walks as from a lifted rod,
Walks like Adam spurn'd by God

From the gates of Paradise,—
Walks like him, with sin-veil'd sight,—
Sees, like him, the gathering night,
All his gain of knowledge shares,
All his loss of blindness bears.
I have boldly dared to plan
The refashioning of Man,—
—T h e r e ' s my work,—Sin's image grown,
Whom God moulded in His own.—
Forth! to wider fields away!
Here's no room for battle-play!

[*Going; but pauses as he sees* AGNES *by the beach.*]

See, she listens by the shore,
As to airy songs afloat.
So she listen'd in the boat
As the stormy surge it tore,—
Listening, to the thwart she clung,—
Listening still, the sea-foam hoar
From her open forehead flung.
'Tis as though her ear were changing
Function, and her eye were listening.

[*He approaches.*]

Maiden, is it o'er those glistening
Reaches that your eye is ranging?

AGNES.

[*Without turning round.*]

Neither those nor aught of earth;
Nothing of them I descry.
But a greater earth there gleams
Sharply outlined on the sky,
Foaming floods and spreading streams,
Mists and sunshine breaking forth.

Scarlet-shafted flames are playing
Over cloud-capp'd mountain heads,
And an endless desert spreads,
Whereupon great palms are swaying
In the bitter-breathing blast.
Swart the shadows that they cast.
Nowhere any living thing;
Like a new world at its birth;
And I hear strange accents ring,
And a Voice interpreting:
"Choose thy endless loss or gain,
Do thy work and bear thy pain;—
Thou shalt people this new earth!"

BRAND.

[*Carried away.*]

Say, what further!

AGNES.

[*Laying her hand on her breast.*]

In my soul
I can feel new powers awaking,
I can see a dayspring breaking,
I can feel full floods that roll,
And my heart grows larger, freer,
Clasps the world within its girth,
And a voice interprets: H e r e
Shalt thou people a new earth!
All the thoughts that men shall utter,
All the deeds men shall achieve,
Waken, whisper, quiver, mutter,
As if now they were to live;
And I rather feel than see

Him who sits enthroned above,
Feel that He looks down on me
Full of sadness and of love,
Tender-bright as morning's breath,
And yet sorrowing unto death:
And I hear strange accents wake:
"Now thou must be made, and make;
Choose thy endless loss or gain!—
Do thy work and bear thy pain!"

BRAND.

Inwards! In! O word of might,
Now I see my way aright.
In o u r s e l v e s is that young Earth,
Ripe for the divine new-birth;
Will, the fiend, must t h e r e be slain,
Adam t h e r e be born again.
Let the world then take its way,
Brutal toil or giddy play;
But if e'er we meet in fight,
If my work it seek to blight,
Then, by heaven, I'll smite and slay!
Room within the wide world's span,
Self completely to fulfil,—
That's a valid right of Man,
And no more than that I will!
[*After pondering awhile in silence.*]
To fulfil oneself! And yet,
With a heritage of debt?
[*Pauses and looks out.*]
Who is she, that, stooping deep,
Clambers hither up the steep,—
Crooked back and craning crop?
Now for breath she has to stop,

Clutches wildly lest she stumble,
And her skinny fingers fumble
Fierce for something that she drags
In those deep and roomy bags.
Skirt, like folds of feather'd skin,
Dangling down her shrivelled shin;
Hands, a pair of clenched hooks;
So the eagle's carcass looks
Nail'd against the barn-door top.
[*In sudden anguish.*]
What chill memories upstart,—
O, what gusts from childhood dart
Frosty showers on her—and other
Fiercer frost upon my heart—?
God of grace! It is my Mother!

BRAND'S MOTHER.

[*Comes up, stops when half seen above the slope, holds her hand up to shade her eyes, and looks round.*]

He's here, they told me.
[*Coming nearer.*]
Drat the blaze,—
It nearly takes away my sight!
Son, is that you?

BRAND.

Yes.

HIS MOTHER.

[*Rubbing her eyes.*]

Hoo, those rays,
They burn one's very eyes outright;
I can't tell priest from boor.

BRAND.

Sun's light
At home I never saw at all
'Twixt fall of leaf and cuckoo's call.

HIS MOTHER.

[*Laughing quietly.*]

Ay, t h e r e 'tis good. One's gripped with frost
Like icicles o'er a plunging river,
Strong to d a r e anything whatever,
—And yet believe one is not lost.

BRAND

Farewell. My leisure time is spent.

HIS MOTHER.

Ay, thou wast ever loth to stay.
As boy thou long'dst to be away—

BRAND.

It was at your desire I went.

HIS MOTHER.

Ay, and good reason too, I say
'Twas needful thou shouldst be a priest.
[*Examines him more closely.*]
H'm, he is grown up strong and tall.
But heed t h i s word of mine, at least,—
Care for thy life, son!

BRAND.

Is that all?

HIS MOTHER.

Thy life? What's dearer?

BRAND.

I would say:
Have you more counsels to convey?

HIS MOTHER.

For others, use them as you may,
And welcome. But thy life, O save it
For my sake; it was I that gave it.
[*Angrily.*]
Your mad deed's talked of far and near;
It scares and harrows me to hear.
On such a day to dare the fjord,
And squander what you're bound to hoard!
You of our clan survive alone,
You are my son, my flesh and bone;
The roof-tree beam that copes and clinches
The house I've builded up by inches.
Stick fast; hold out; endure; survive!
Guard your life! Never let it go!
An heir is bound to keep alive,—
And you'll be mine—one day—you know——

BRAND.

Indeed? And that was why you plann'd
With loaded purse to seek me here?

HIS MOTHER.

Son, are you raving?
[*Steps back.*]
Don't come near.
Stay where you are! You'll feel my hand!
[*More calmly.*]
What were you meaning?—Just attend:
I'm getting older year by year;

Sooner or later comes the end;
Then you'll inherit all I've treasured,
'Tis duly counted, weighed and measured—
Nay, nay, I've nothing on me now!—
It's all at home. It is but scant;
But he that gets it will not want.
Stand back there! Don't come near!—I vow
I'll fling no stiver of my store
Down fissures, nor in spot unknown
Hide any, nor below a stone.
In wall, or underneath a floor;
All shall be yours, son, you shall be
My sole and single legatee.

BRAND.

And the conditions?

HIS MOTHER.

One I make,
No more; don't set your life at stake.
Keep up our family and name,
That's all the gratitude I claim.
Then see that nothing go to waste,—
Naught be divided or displaced;—
Add much or little, as you will;
But O preserve, preserve it still!

BRAND.

[*After a short pause.*]

One thing needs clearing 'twixt us two.
From childhood I have thwarted you;—
You've been no mother, I no son,
Till you are gray, my childhood gone.

HIS MOTHER.

I do not ask to be caress'd.
Be what you please; I am not nice.
Be stern, be fierce, be cold as ice,
It will not cleave my armour'd breast;
Keep, though you hoard it, what was mine,
And never let it leave our line!

BRAND.

[*Going a step nearer.*]

And if I took it in my head
To strew it to the winds, instead?

HIS MOTHER.

[*Reeling back.*]

Strew, what through all these years of care
Has bent my back and bleach'd my hair?

BRAND.

[*Nodding slowly.*]

To strew it.

HIS MOTHER.

Strew it! If you do,
It is my soul that you will strew!

BRAND.

And if I do it, even so?
If I one evening vigil keep
With lighted taper by your bed,
While you with clasped Psalter sleep
The first night's slumber of the dead,—

If I then fumble round about,
Draw treasure after treasure out,
Take up the taper, hold it low——?

HIS MOTHER.

[*Approaching excitedly.*]

Whence comes this fancy?

BRAND.

Would you know?

HIS MOTHER.

Ay.

BRAND.

From a childish scene that still
Lives in my mind, and ever will,
That seams my soul with foul device
Like an infestering cicatrice.
It was an autumn evening. Dead
Was father; you lay sick in bed.
I stole where he was laid by night,
All pallid in the silver light.
I stood and watch'd him from my nook,
Saw how his two hands clasp'd the Book;
I marvell'd why he slept so long,
Mark'd his thin wrists, and smelt the strong
Odour of linen newly dried;—
And then I heard a step outside;—
A woman enter'd, strode apace
Up to the bed, nor saw my face.
Then she began to grope and pry;
First put the corpse's vesture by,
Drew forth a bundle, then a store,
Counted, and whisper'd: There is more!

Then, grubbing deeper in the ground,
Clutch'd a seal'd packet tightly bound,
With trembling fingers strove and tore,
Bit it in two, groped deeper, found,
Counted, and whisper'd: There is more!
She cried, she cursed, she wail'd, she wept,
She scented where the treasure lay,
And then with eager anguish swept
Down like a falcon on her prey.
When she had ransacked all the room,
She turn'd, like one who hears her doom,
Wrapp'd up her booty in a shawl,
And faintly groaned: So t h a t was all!

HIS MOTHER.

I needed much, I little won;
And very dearly was it bought.

BRAND.

Even more dearly than you thought;
Son's-heart you shattered in your son.

HIS MOTHER.

Tut, tut. To barter hearts for gold
Was customary from of old.
Still dearer once I had to pay,—
I think I gave my life away.
Something I gave that now is not;—
I seem to see it flash in air
Like something foolish and yet fair:
I gave—I know not rightly what;—
"Love" was the name it used to bear.—
I know it was a bitter choice;
I know my father gave his voice;

"Forget the peasant-boy and wed
The other, 'spite his frosty pate;
A fellow with a knowing head,
He'll fairly double the estate!"
I took him, and he brought me shame.
The doubled gettings never came.
But I have drudged with streaming brow,
And there is little lacking now.

BRAND.

And do you, as you near your grave,
Know that it was your s o u l you gave?

HIS MOTHER.

It's clear that I knew t h a t, at least,
Giving my son to be a priest.
When the hour comes, a grateful heir
Of my salvation will take care;
I own the acres and the pence,
And you the deathbed eloquence.

BRAND.

With all your cunning you mistook;
You read me wrong in childhood's book.
And many dwell by bank and brae
Who love their children in that way;—
A child's a steward, you suppose,
Of the parental cast-off clothes;
A glimpse of the Eternal flits
At times across your wandering wits;
You snatch at it, and dream you spring
Into the essence of the thing

By grafting Riches upon Race;—
That Death with Life you can displace,
That years, if steadily amass'd,
Will yield Eternity at last.

HIS MOTHER.

Don't rummage in your Mother's mind,
But take what she will leave behind.

BRAND.

The debt as well?

HIS MOTHER.

The debt? What debt?
There is none.

BRAND.

Very good; but yet
Suppose there were,—I should be bound
To settle every claim I found.
The son must satisfy each call
Before the mother's burial.
Though but four empty walls I took,
I still should own your debit-book.

HIS MOTHER.

No law commands it.

BRAND.

Not the knd
That ink on parchment ever writ;
But deep in every honest mind
Another law is burnt and bit,—

And that I execute. Thou blind!
Learn to have sight! Thou hast debased
The dwelling-place of God on earth,
The spirit He lent thee hast laid waste,
The image that thou bor'st at birth
With mould and filthiness defaced;
Thy Soul, that once had flight and song,
Thrust, clipp'd, among the common throng.
That is your debt. What will you do
When God demands His own of you?

HIS MOTHER.

[*Confused.*]

What will I do? Do?——

BRAND.

Never fear;
I take your debt upon me whole.
God's image, blotted in your soul,
In mine, Will-cleansed, shall stand clear.
Go with good courage to your rest.
By debt you shall not sleep oppress'd.

HIS MOTHER.

My debt and sin you'll wipe away?

BRAND

Your debt. Observe. The debt: no more
Your debt alone I can repay;
Your sin yourself must answer for.
The sum of native human worth
Crush'd in the brutish toil of earth

Can verily by human aid
To the last atom be repaid;
But in the l o s i n g of it lies
The sin, which who repents not—dies!

HIS MOTHER.

[*Uneasily.*]

'Twere best I took my homeward way
To the deep valley, to the gloom;
Such rank and poisonous fancies bloom
In this insufferable ray;
I'm almost fainting at the fume.

BRAND.

Seek you the shadow; I abide.
And if you long for light and sky,
And fain would see me ere you die,
Call me, and I am by your side.

HIS MOTHER.

Yes, with a sermon on my doom!

BRAND.

No, tender both as priest and child
I'll shield you from the wind of dread,
And singing low beside your bed
Lull to repose your anguish wild.

HIS MOTHER.

And that with lifted hand you swear?

BRAND.

When you repent I will be there.
[*Approaching her.*]
But I too make conditions. Hear.
Whatever in this world is dear
Willingly you must from you rend,
And naked to the grave descend.

HIS MOTHER.

[*Wildly repulsing him.*]

Bid fire be sever'd from its heat,
Snow from its cold, wave from its wet!
Ask less!

BRAND.

Toss a babe overboard,
And beg the blessing of the Lord.

HIS MOTHER.

Ask something else: ask hunger, thirst,—
But not what all men deem the worst!

BRAND.

If just that w o r s t is asked in vain,
No other can His grace obtain.

HIS MOTHER.

A money-alms I will present you!

BRAND.

All?

HIS MOTHER.

All! Son, will not m u c h content you?

BRAND.

Your guilt you never shall put by
Till you, like Job, in ashes die.

HIS MOTHER.

[*Wringing her hands.*]

My life destroy'd, my soul denied,
My goods soon scatter'd far and wide!
Home then, and in these fond arms twine
All that I still can say is m i n e !
My treasure, child in anguish born,
For thee my bleeding breast was torn;—
Home then, and weep as mothers weep
Over their sickly babes asleep.—
Why did my soul in flesh take breath,
If love of flesh is the soul's death?—
Stay near me, priest!—I am not clear
How I shall feel when death is near.
"Naked into the grave descend,"—
I'll wait, at least, until the end. [*Goes.*

BRAND.

[*Gazing after her.*]

Yes, thy son shall still be near,
Call to him, and he shall hear.
Stretch thy hand, and, cold and perish'd,
At his heart it shall be cherish'd.

[*Goes down to* AGNES.]

As the Morn not so the Night.
Then my soul was set on fight,
Then I heard the war-drum rattle,

Yearn'd the sword of Wrath to swing,
Lies to trample, Trolls to fling,
Fill the world with clashing battle.

AGNES.

[*Has turned round to him, and looks radiantly up.*]

By the Night the Morn was pale.
Then I sought the joys that fail;
Sought to triumph by attaining
What in losing I am gaining.

BRAND.

Visions stirring, visions splendid
Like a flock of swans descended,
On their spreading wings upbore me,
And I saw my way before me;—
Sin-subduer of the Age
Sternly stemming seas that rage.
Church-processions, banners streaming,
Anthems rolling, incense steaming,
Golden goblets, victor-songs,
Rapt applause of surging throngs,
Made a glory where I fought.
All in dazzling hues was wrought;—
Yet it was an empty dream,
A brief mountain-vision, caught
Half in glare and half in gleam.
N o w I stand where twilight gray
Long forestalls the ebb of day,
'Twixt the water and the wild,
From the busy world exiled,
Just a strip of heaven's blue dome
Visible;—but this is H o m e.

Now my Sabbath dream is dark;
To the stall my winged steed;
But I see a higher Mark.
Than to wield the knightly sabre,—
Daily duty, daily labor,
Hallow'd to a Sabbath-deed.

AGNES.

And that God, who was to fall?

BRAND.

He shall, none the less, be fell'd,—
But in secret, unbeheld,
Not before the eyes of all.
Now I see, I judged astray
Where the Folk's salvation lay.
Not by high heroic charges
Can you make the People whole;
That which faculty enlarges
Does not heal the fissured soul.
It is W i l l alone that matters,
Will alone that mars or makes,
Will, that no distraction scatters,
And that no resistance breaks.—
[*Turns towards the hamlet, where the shades of night are beginning to fall.*]
Come then, Men, who downcast roam
The pent valley of my home;—
Close conversing we will try
Our own souls to purify,
Slackness curb and falsehood kill,
Rouse the lion's cub of Will!
Manly, as the hands that smite,

Are the hands that hold the hoe;
There's o n e end for all,—to grow
Tablets whereon God may write.

[*He is going.* EINAR *confronts him.*

EINAR.

Stand, and what you took restore!

BRAND.

Is it she? You see her there.

EINAR.

[*To* AGNES.]

Choose between the sunny shore
And this savage den of care.

AGNES.

There I have no choice to make.

EINAR

Agnes, Agnes, hear me yet!
The old saying you forget,
Light to lift and hard to bear.

AGNES.

Go with God, thou tempter fair;
I shall bear until I break.

EINAR.

For thy mother's, sisters' sake!

AGNES.

Bring my greetings to my Home;
I will write—if words should come.

EINAR.

Over ocean's gleaming breast
White sails hurry from the strand;—
Like the sighs of dreaming brows,
Lofty, diamond-beaded prows
Speed them to their haven-rest
In a far-off vision'd land.

AGNES.

Sail to westward, sail to east;—
Think of me as one deceased.

EINAR.

As a sister come with me.

AGNES.

[*Shaking her head.*]

'Twixt us rolls a boundless sea.

EINAR.

O, then homeward to thy mother!

AGNES.

[*Softly.*]

Not from Master, Friend, and Brother.

BRAND.

[*Coming a step nearer.*]

Youthful maiden, weigh it well.
In this mountain-prison pent,
Oversoar'd by crag and fell,
In this dim and yawning rent,
Life henceforward shall be gray
As an ebbing autumn-day.

AGNES.

Gloom appals no more; afar
Through the cloud-wrack gleams a star.

BRAND.

Know, that I am stern to crave,
All or Nothing I will have;
If that call you disobey,
You have flung your life away.
No abatement in distress,
And for sin no tenderness,—
If life's service God refuse,
Life you joyfully must lose.

EINAR.

Fly this wild insensate play!
Spurn the sullen Doomer's sway;
Live the life you know you may!

BRAND.

At the crossway standst thou:—choose. [*Goes.*

EINAR.

Choose the stillness or the strife!
For the choice to g o or s t a y
Is a choice of calm or fray,
Is a choice of Night or Day,
Is a choice of Death or Life!

AGNES.

[*Rises, and then says slowly:*]

On through Death. On into Night.—
Dawn beyond glows rosy-bright.

[*She follows, where* BRAND *has gone.* EINAR *gazes a moment in bewilderment after her, then bows his head, and goes back to the fjord.*

ACT THIRD

Three years later. A little garden by the Parsonage. A great precipice above, a stone wall round. The fjord, narrow and pent in, appears in the background. The house-door opens upon the garden. Afternoon.

BRAND *is standing on the steps outside the house.* AGNES *is sitting on the step at his feet.*

AGNES.

My dearest husband, still your eye
Over the fjord roves anxiously—

BRAND.

I wait a summons.

AGNES.

With brows bent!

BRAND.

My Mother's summons. This three years
I've waited between hopes and fears
The summons that was never sent.
To-day 'twas told me, past a doubt,
That her life's span is almost out.

AGNES.

[*Softly and tenderly.*]

Brand, without summons you should go?

BRAND.

[*Shakes his head.*]

Till she of her offence repent
I have no comfort to bestow.

AGNES.

She is your mother!

BRAND.

It were sin
To worship idols in my kin.

AGNES.

Brand, you are stern!

BRAND.

To you?

AGNES.

Oh no!

BRAND.

I warn'd you that the way was steep.

AGNES.

[*Smiling.*]

It was not true; you did not keep
Your word.

BRAND.

Yes, here the ice-wind rives;
Your cheek has lost its youthful glow,
Your tender heart is touch'd with snow.

Our home is built where nothing thrives,
Amid a barren waste of stone.

AGNES.

It lies the safer, then! So prone
Beetles yon jutting mountain-wall,
That, when the leafy spring is near
The brimming avalanche vaults sheer
Over our heads, and we lie clear
As in the hollow of a fall.

BRAND.

The sun we never see at all.

AGNES.

Oh, yet he dances warm and bright
Atop yon mountain that we face.

BRAND.

For three weeks, true,—at summer's height,—
But never struggles to its base!

AGNES.

[*Looks fixedly at him, rises and says:*]

Brand, there's o n e thought at which you shrink.

BRAND.

No, y o u !

AGNES.

No, you!

BRAND.

Within you bear
A secret terror.

AGNES.

Which you share!

BRAND.

You reel as from a dizzy brink!
Out with it! speak it out!

AGNES.

'Tis true
I've trembled, whiles—— [*Hesitates.*

BRAND.

Trembled! At what?

AGNES.

For Alf.

BRAND.

For Alf?

AGNES.

And so have you!

BRAND.

At times. But no, God takes him not!
God's merciful! My child shall grow
To be a strong man yet, I know.
Where is he now?

AGNES.

He's sleeping.

BRAND.

[*Looks in through the door.*]

See;
Of pain and grief he dreams not, he;
The little hand is plump and round——

AGNES.

Yet pale.

BRAND.

But that will pass.

AGNES.

How deep,
Restful and quickening is his sleep.

BRAND.

God bless thee; in thy sleep grow sound!
[*Shuts the door.*]
To all my labours you and he
Have brought light and tranquillity;
Each irksome task, each mournful care,
'Twas easy, in your midst, to bear;
You near, I never felt dismay,
Grew braver by his baby-play.
A martyrdom I held my Call,
But something has transform'd it all,—
Success still follows my footfall.

AGNES.

Yes, Brand; but you d e s e r v e success.
Oh, you have battled, in storm and stress;—
Toil'd on through woe and weariness;—
But tears of blood you wept, apart——

BRAND.

And yet it seem'd so light a thing;
With you, love stole upon my heart
Like a glad sunny day in Spring.
In me Love never had been lit;
No parents' hand had kindled it,
Rather they quench'd the fitful flashes
That gleam'd at moments in the ashes.
It was as though the tender Soul
That mute and darkling in me slept,
Had, closely garner'd, all been kept
To be my sweet Wife's aureole.

AGNES.

Not mine alone: but whosoe'er
In our great Household has a share,
Each sorrowing son, each needy brother,
Each weeping child, each mourning mother,
Of quickening nurture have their part,
At the rich banquet of thy heart.

BRAND.

Only through you two. By your hand
That heavenly bridge of love was spann'd;
No single soul can all contain
Except it first have yearn'd for o n e .
I had to long and yearn in vain,
So my heart harden'd into stone.

AGNES.

And yet—your love is merciless;
You chasten whom you would caress.

BRAND.

You, Agnes?

AGNES.

Me? O nay, dear, nay!
On me a lightsome load you lay.
But many falter at the call
To offer N o t h i n g or else a l l.

BRAND.

What the world calls by that name "Love,"
I know not and I reck not of.
God's love I recognise alone,
Which melts not at the piteous plaint,
Which is not moved by dying groan,
And its caress i s chastisement.
What answer'd through the olive-trees
God, when the Son in anguish lay,
Praying, "O take this cup away!"
D i d He then take it? Nay, child, nay:
He made him drink it to the lees.

AGNES.

By such a measure meted, all
The souls of earth are forfeited.

BRAND.

None knows on whom the doom shall fall;
But God in flaming speech hath said:
"Be faithful through the hour of strife:
Haggling wins not the crown of life!"
Anguish'd repentance scales not heaven,
The martyr's doom you must fulfil.

That you lack'd s t r e n g t h may be forgiven,—
But never that you wanted w i l l.

AGNES.

Yes, it shall be as you have said;
O lift me to those heights you tread;
To your high heaven lead me forth,
My spirit is strong, my flesh is frail;
Oft, anguish-struck, I faint, I fail,—
My clogg'd foot drags upon the earth.

BRAND.

See, child; of all men God makes one
Demand: No coward compromise!
Whose work's half done or falsely done,
Condemn'd with God his whole word lies.
We must give sanction to this teaching
By l i v i n g it and not by preaching.

AGNES.

[*Throws herself on his neck.*]

Lead where you will; I follow you!

BRAND.

No precipice is too steep for t w o.

Enter the DOCTOR; *he has come down the road, and stops outside the garden fence.*

THE DOCTOR.

Ha! loving doves at their caresses
In these dark craggy wildernesses?

AGNES.

My dear old Doctor, here at last!
Come in, come in!

[*Runs down and opens the garden gate.*

THE DOCTOR.

Ho, not so fast!
We've first to settle an old score.—
What! Tie yourself to this wild moor,
Where piercing winds of winter tear
Like ice, soul, body to the core——

BRAND.

Not soul.

THE DOCTOR.

Not? Well, I must admit,
That seems about the truth of it.
Your hasty compact has an air
Of standing firm, unmoved, erect,
Though otherwise, one might expect,
By ancient usage, soon to fade
That which so suddenly was made.

AGNES.

A sunbeam's kiss, a bell's note, may
Awaken for a summer's day.

THE DOCTOR.

A patient waits for me. Farewell.

BRAND.

My mother?

THE DOCTOR.

Yes. You also go?

BRAND.

Not now.

THE DOCTOR.

Have been, I daresay?

BRAND.

No.

THE DOCTOR.

Priest, you are hard. Through mist and snow
I've trudged across the desolate fell,
Well knowing that she is of those
Who pay like paupers.

BRAND.

May God bless
Your skill and your unweariedness!
Ease, if you can, her bitter throes.

THE DOCTOR.

Bless my goodwill! I tarried not
A moment when I heard her state.

BRAND.

You she has summon'd: I'm forgot,—
And sick at heart, I wait, I wait.

THE DOCTOR.

Come without summons!

BRAND.

Till she calls,
I have no place within those walls.

THE DOCTOR.

[*To* AGNES.]

You hapless blossom, laid within
The pitiless grasp of such a lord!

BRAND.

I am not pitiless.

AGNES.

He had pour'd
His blood, to wash her soul from sin!

BRAND.

Unask'd, upon myself I took
The clearance of her debit-book.

THE DOCTOR.

Clear off your own!

BRAND.

One man may get
Hundreds acquitted, in God's eyes.

THE DOCTOR.

Ay; not a Beggar, though, who lies
Himself o'er head and ears in debt.

BRAND.

Beggar or rich,—with all my soul
I w i l l;—and that one thing's the w h o l e!

THE DOCTOR.

Yes, in your ledger, truly, Will
Has enough entries and to spare:
But, priest, your L o v e-account is still
A virgin-chapter, blank and bare. [*Goes.*

BRAND.

[*Follows him awhile with his eyes.*]

Never did word so sorely prove
The smirch of lies, as this word L o v e:
With devilish craft, where will is frail,
Men lay L o v e over, as a veil,
And cunningly conceal thereby
That all their life is coquetry.
Whose path's the steep and perilous slope,
L e t h i m b u t l o v e,—and he may shirk it;
If he prefer Sin's easy circuit,
L e t h i m b u t l o v e,—he still may hope;
If God he seeks, but fears the fray,
L e t h i m b u t l o v e,—'tis straight his prey;
If with wide-open eyes he err,
L e t h i m b u t l o v e,—there's safety there!

AGNES.

Yes, it is false: yet still I fall
Questioning: Is it, after all?

BRAND.

One point's omitted: First the Will
Law's thirst for righteousness must still.
You must first will! Not only things
Attainable, in more or less,
Nor only where the action brings
Some hardship and some weariness;
No, you must will with flashing eyes
Your way through all earth's agonies.
It is not martyrdom to toss
In anguish on the deadly cross:
But to have will'd to perish so,
To will it through each bodily throe,
To will it with still-tortured mind,
This, only this, redeems mankind.

AGNES.

[*Clinging closely to him.*]

If at the terrible call I cower,
Speak, strong-soul'd husband, in that hour!

BRAND.

If Will has conquer'd in that strife,
Then comes at length the hour of Love;
Then it descends like a white dove,
Bearing the olive-leaf of life:
But in this nerveless, slothful state,
The true, the sovereign Love is—Hate!
[*In horror.*]
Hate! Hate! O Titan's toil, to will
That one brief easy syllable!
[*Goes hurriedly into the house*

AGNES.

[*Looking through the open door.*]

He kneels beside his little son,
And heaves as if with bursts of tears;
He clutches close the bed, like one
That knows no refuge from his fears.—
O what a wealth of tender ruth
Lies hidden in this breast of steel!
Alf he d a r e s love: the baby-heel
Has not yet felt Earth's serpent-tooth.
[*Cries out in terror.*]
Ha! he leaps up with ashy brow!
Wringing his hands! what sees he now!

BRAND.

[*Coming out.*]

A summons came?

AGNES.

No summons, no!

BRAND.

[*Looking back into the house.*]

His parch'd skin burns in fever-glow;
His temples throb, his pulses race——!
Oh fear not, Agnes!

AGNES.

God of grace——!

BRAND.

Nay, have no fear——
[*Calls out over the road.*]
The summons, see!

A Man.

[*Through the garden-gate.*]

You must come n o w, priest!

Brand.

Instantly!

What message?

The Man.

A mysterious one.
Sitting in bed she forward bent,
And said: "Get the priest here: begone!
My half-goods for the sacrament."

Brand.

[*Starts back.*]

Her h a l f-goods! No! Say no!

The Man.

[*Shakes his head.*]

My word
Would then not utter what I heard.

Brand.

H a l f! H a l f! It was the w h o l e she meant!

The Man.

Maybe; but she spoke loud and high;
And I don't easily forget.

BRAND.

[*Seizes his arm*]

Before God's Judgment, will you yet
Dare to attest she spoke it?

THE MAN.

Ay.

BRAND.

[*Firmly.*]

Go, tell her, this reply was sent:
"Nor priest shall come, nor sacrament."

THE MAN.

[*Looking at him doubtfully.*]

You surely have not understood:
It is your Mother that appeals.

BRAND.

I know no law that sternlier deals
With strangers than with kindred blood.

THE MAN.

A hard word, that.

BRAND.

She knows the call,—
To offer N o t h i n g, or else a l l.

THE MAN.

Priest!

BRAND.

Dock the gold-calf as she will,
Say, it remains an idol still.

THE MAN.

The scourge you send her I will lay
As gently on her as I may.
She has this comfort left her, too:
God is not quite so hard as you! [*Goes.*

BRAND.

Yes, with that comfort's carrion-breath
The world still sickens unto death;
Prompt, in its need, with shriek and song
To lubricate the Judge's tongue.
Of course! The reasonable plan!
For from of old they know their man;—
Since all his works the assurance breathe:
"Yon gray-beard may be haggled with!"

[THE MAN *has met another man on the road; they come back together.*

BRAND.

A second message!

FIRST MAN.

Yes.

BRAND.

[*To the* SECOND MAN.]

Consent?

SECOND MAN.

Nine-tenths of it is now the word.

BRAND.

Not all?

SECOND MAN.

Not all.

BRAND.

As you have heard:—
Nor priest shall come, nor sacrament.

SECOND MAN.

She begg'd it, bitterly distress'd——

FIRST MAN.

Priest, once she bore you on her breast!

BRAND.

[*Clenching his hands.*]

I may not by two measures weigh
My kinsman and my enemy.

SECOND MAN.

Sore is her state and dire her need;
Come, or else send her a God-speed!

BRAND.

[*To* FIRST MAN.]

Go; tell her still: God's wine and bread
Must on a spotless board be spread. [*The Men go.*

AGNES.

I tremble, Brand. You seem a Sword
Swung flaming by a wrathful Lord!

BRAND.

[*With tears in his voice.*]

Does not the world face me no less
With swordless sheath upon its thigh?
Am I not torn and baffled by
Its dull defiant stubbornness?

AGNES.

A hard condition you demand.

BRAND.

Dare you impose a lighter?

AGNES.

Lay
That stern demand on whom you may,
And see who, tested so, will stand.

BRAND.

Nay, you have reason for that fear.
So base, distorted, barren, sere,
The aspiring soul in men is grown.
'Tis thought a marvel,—by bequest
To give away one's wealth unknown.
And be anonymously bless'd.
The hero, bid him blot his name,
Content him with the service wrought,
Kings, Kaisers, bid them do the same—
And see how many fields are fought!
The poet, bid him unbeholden

Loose his bright fledglings from the cage,
So that none dream h e gave that golden
Plumage, and h e that vocal rage;
Try the green bough, or try the bare,
S a c r i f i c e is not anywhere.
Earth has enslaved all earthly things;—
Over Life's precipices cast,
Each to its mouldering branches clings,
And, if they crumble, clutches fast
With tooth and nail to straws and bast.

AGNES.

And, while they helpless, hopeless fall,
You cry: Give n o t h i n g or give a l l!

BRAND.

He who would conquer still must fight,
Rise, fallen to the highest height.
[*A brief silence: his voice changes.*]
And yet, when with that stern demand
Before some living soul I stand,
I seem like one that floats afar
Storm-shatter'd on a broken spar.
With solitary anguish wrung
I've bitten this chastising tongue,
And thirsted, as I aim'd the blow,
To clasp the bosom of my foe.
Go, Agnes, watch the sleeping boy,
And sing him into dreams of joy.
An infant's soul is like the sleep
Of still clear tarns in summer-light.
A mother over it may sweep
And hover, like the bird, whose flight
Is mirror'd in the deepest deep.

AGNES.

What does it mean, Brand? Wheresoe'er
You aim your thought-shafts—they fly t h e r e!

BRAND.

Oh, nothing. Softly watch the child.

AGNES.

Give me a watchword.

BRAND.

Stern?

AGNES.

No, mild.

BRAND.

[*Clasping her.*]

The blameless shall not taste the grave.

AGNES.

[*Looking brightly up at him.*]

Then o n e is ours God may not crave!

[*Goes into the house.*

BRAND.

[*Looking fixedly before him.*]

But if he m i g h t? What "Isaac's Fear"
Once ventured, He may venture here.
[*Shakes off the thought.*]
No, no, my sacrifice is made,
The calling of my life gainsaid—

Like the Lord's thunder to go forth
And rouse the sleepers of the earth.
Sacrifice! Liar! there was none!
I miss'd it when my Dream was done,
When Agnes woke me—and follow'd free
To labour in the gloom with me.
[*Looks along the road.*]
Why tarries still the dying call,
Her word, that she will offer all,
That she has won that which uproots
Sin's deepest fibres, rankest shoots!
See there——! No, it is but the Mayor,
Well-meaning, brisk, and debonnaire,
Both hands in pockets, round, remiss,
A bracketed parenthesis.

Enter MAYOR.

THE MAYOR.

[*Through the garden-gate.*]

Good-day! Our meetings are but rare,
Perhaps my time is chosen amiss——

BRAND.

[*Pointing to house.*]

Come in.

THE MAYOR.

Thanks; here I'm quite content.
Should my proposal meet assent,
I'm very sure the upshot of it
Would issue in our common profit.

BRAND.

Name your desire.

THE MAYOR.

Your mother's state,
I understand, is desperate.
I'm sorry.

BRAND.

That I do not doubt.

THE MAYOR.

I'm very sorry.

BRAND.

Pray, speak out.

THE MAYOR.

She's old, however. Welladay,
We are all bound the selfsame way—
And, as I just drove by, occurr'd
The thought that, after all, "to leap
Is just as easy as to creep":
Moreover, many have averr'd,
That she and you have been imbrued
For years in a domestic feud——

BRAND.

Domestic feud?

THE MAYOR.

She's out and out
Close-fisted, so they say, you know.
You think it goes too far, no doubt.
A man's own claims he can't forego.
She keeps exclusive occupation
Of all that was bequeath'd to you.

BRAND.

Exclusive occupation, true.

THE MAYOR.

A ready cause of irritation
In families. Surmising thence
That you await with resignation
The moment of her going hence,
I hope I may without offence
Speak out, although I quite admit
The time I've chosen is unfit.

BRAND.

Or now or later, nought I care.

THE MAYOR.

Well, to the point then, fair and square.
When once your mother's dead and blest,
In the earth's bosom laid to rest,
You're r i c h!

BRAND.

You think so?

THE MAYOR.

Think? Nay, man,
That's sure. She's land in every port,
Far as a telescope can scan.
You're rich!

BRAND.

'Spite the Succession Court?

THE MAYOR.
[*Smiling.*]

What of it? That cuts matters short
When many fight for pelf and debt.
Here no man's interest suffers let.

BRAND.

And what if some day, all the same,
Came a co-heir to debt and pelf
Crying: "I'm he!" and urged his claim?

THE MAYOR.

He'd have to be the devil himself!
Just look to me! None else has here
The smallest right to interfere.
I know my business: lean on me!
Well, then; you'll now be well-to-do,
Rich even; you'll no longer brook
Life in this God-forsaken nook;
The whole land's open now to you.

BRAND.

Mayor, is not what you want to say,
Pithily put, just: "Go away"?

THE MAYOR.

Pretty much that. All parties' good
Were so best answered. If you would
But eye attentively the herd
To whom you minister God's word,
You'd find you're no more of a piece
With them than foxes are with geese.

Pray, understand me! You have gifts,
Good where the social field is wide,
But dangerous for folk whose pride
Is to be Lords of rocky rifts
And Freemen of the ravine-side.

BRAND.

To a man's feet his native haunt
Is as unto the tree the root.
If there his labour fill no want
His deeds are doomed, his music mute.

THE MAYOR.

Success means just: Self-adaptation
To the requirements of the nation.

BRAND.

Which from the heights you best o'erlook,
Not from the crag-encompass'd nook.

THE MAYOR.

That talk is fit for citizens,
Not for poor peasants of the glens.

BRAND.

O, still your limitation vain
Between the mountain and the plain!
World-citizens you'd be of right,
While every civic claim you slight;
And think, like dastards, to go free
By whining: "We're a small folk, we!"

THE MAYOR.

All has its time, each time its need,
Each age its proper work to do;
We also flung our mite into
The world's great treasure of bold deed.
True, that's long since; but, after all,
The mite was not so very small.
Now the land's dwindled and decay'd,
But our renown still lives in story.
The days of our reported glory
Were when the great King Belë sway'd.
Many a tale is still related
About the brothers Wulf and Thor,
And gallant fellows by the score,
Went harrying to the British shore,
And plunder'd till their heart was sated.
The Southrons shriek'd with quivering lip,
"Lord, help us from these fierce men's grip,"
And these "fierce men," beyond all doubt,
Had from o u r harbours sallied out.
And how these rovers wreak'd their ire,
And dealt out death with sword and fire!
Nay, legend names a lion-hearted
Hero that took the cross; in verity,
It is not mention'd that he started——

BRAND.

He left behind a large posterity,
This promise-maker?

THE MAYOR.

Yes, indeed;
But how came you to——?

BRAND.

O, I read
His features clearly in the breed
Of promise-heroes of to-day,
Who take the Cross in just his way.

THE MAYOR.

Yes, his descendants still remain.
But we were on King Belë's reign!
So first abroad we battled. Then,
Visited our own countrymen
And kinsmen, with the axe and fire;
Trampled their harvests gaily down,
Scorch'd mansion-wall and village spire,
And wove ourselves the hero's crown.—
Over the blood thus set a-flowing
There's been perhaps excessive crowing;
But, after what I've said, I may,
I think, without a touch of vanity,
Point backward to the stir we made
In the great Age long since decay'd,
And hold that we indeed have paid
Our little mite of Fire and Fray
Towards the Progress of Humanity.

BRAND.

Yet do you not, in fact, eschew
The phrase, "Nobility's a trust,"—
And drive hoe, plough, and harrow through
King Belë's patrimonial dust?

THE MAYOR.

By no means. Only go and mark
Our parish on its gaudy-nights,
Where I with Constable and Clerk,

And Judge, preside as leading lights;
You'll warrant, when the punch goes round,
King Belë's memory is sound.
With toasts and clinking cups and song,
In speeches short and speeches long,
We drink his health and sound his fame.
I myself often feel inclined
The spinnings of my brain to wind
In flowery woof about his name,
And edify the local mind.
A little poetry pleases me,
And all our folks, in their degree;
But—moderation everywhere!
In l i f e it never must have share,—
Except at night, when folks have leisure,
Between the hours of seven and ten,
When baths of elevating pleasure
May fit the mood of weary men.
Here's where we differ, you and we,
That you desire with main and might
At the same time to p l o u g h and f i g h t.
Your scheme, as far as I can see,
Is: Life and Faith in unity,—
God's warfare and potato-dressing
Inseparably coalescing,
As coal, salt, sulphur, fusing fast,
Evolve just gunpowder at last.

BRAND.

Somewhat so.

THE MAYOR.

Here you'll scheme in vain!
Out in the great world that may stand;—

Go thither with your big demand,
And let us plough our moors and main.

BRAND.

Plough first your brag of old renown
Into the main, and plough it down!
The pigmy is not more the man
For being of Goliath's clan.

THE MAYOR.

Great memories bear the seed of growth.

BRAND.

Yes, m e m o r i e s that to l i f e are bound;
But you, of memory's empty mound,
Have made a stalking-horse for sloth.

THE MAYOR.

I said at first, and still I say:—
To leave us were the wisest way.
Your work here cannot come to good,
Nor your ideas be understood.
The little flights to purer air,
The lifting-up which, now and then,
Is doubtless well for working men,
Shall be m y unremitting care.
Many agreeable facts declare
My ceaseless energy as mayor,—
Through me the population's grown
Double, nay, almost three to one,
Since for the district I have bred
Ever new ways of getting fed.
With stubborn nature still at strife

We've steam'd ahead: our forward march
Here hew'd a road, there flung an arch—
To lead from——

BRAND.

Not from Faith to Life.

THE MAYOR.

To lead from fjordside to the hill.

BRAND.

But not from Doctrine unto Will.

THE MAYOR.

First of all, get a passage clear
From men to men, from place to place.
There were no two opinions here
On that, until you show'd your face.
Now you've made all confusion, dashing
Aurora-flames with lantern light;
With such cross-luminaries flashing,
Who can distinguish wrong from right,
Tell what will mar, and what will mend?
All diverse things you mix and blend,
And into hostile camps divide
Those who should triumph side by side.

BRAND.

Here, notwithstanding, I abide.
Man chooses not his labour's sphere.
Who knows and follows out his call,
Has seen God's writing on the wall,
In words of fire, "Your place is here!"

THE MAYOR.

Stay, then, but keep within your borders;
You're free to purge the folk of crimes,
Vices, and other rifle disorders;
God knows, it's needed oftentimes!
But don't make every working-day
A Sabbath, and your flag display,
As if the Almighty were on board
Of every skiff that skims the fjord.

BRAND.

To use your counsel, I must change
My soul and all her vision's range;
But we are called, o u r s e l v e s to be,
Our own cause bear to victory;
And I will bear it, till the land
Is all illumined where I stand!
The people, your bureaucrat-crew
Have lull'd asleep, shall wake anew;
Too long you've cramp'd and caged apart
These remnants of the Mountain heart;
Out of your niggard hunger-cure
They pass dejected, dull, demure:
Their best, their bravest blood you tap,
Scoop out their marrow and their sap,
Pound into splinters every soul,
That should have stood a welded whole;—
But you may live to hear the roar
Of revolution thunder: W a r!

THE MAYOR.

War?

BRAND.

War!

THE MAYOR.

Be sure, if you should call
To arms, you'll be the first to fall.

BRAND.

The day will come when we shall know
That triumph's height is Overthrow.

THE MAYOR.

Consider, Brand, you have to choose!
Don't stake your fortune on one card.

BRAND.

I do, however!

THE MAYOR.

If you lose,
Your life's irreparably marr'd.
All this world's bounties you possess,
You, a rich Mother's only heir,
With wife and child to be your care,—
It was a kindly hand, confess,
That dealt y o u r terms of happiness!

BRAND.

And what if I should, all the same,
Reject these terms? and m u s t?

THE MAYOR.

Your game
Is over, if you've once unfurl'd
In this last cranny of the world
The standard of your world-wide war.
Turn southward, to yon prosperous shore

Where a man dares lift up his head;
There you may perorate of right
And bid them bleed and bid them fight;
O u r bloodshed is the sweat we pour
In daily wringing rocks for bread.

BRAND.

Here I remain. My home is here,
And here the battle-flag I'll rear!

THE MAYOR

Think what you lose, if overthrown,
And, chiefly, think of what you quit!

BRAND.

Myself I lose, if I submit.

THE MAYOR.

Hopeless is he that fights alone.

BRAND.

The b e s t are with me.

THE MAYOR.

[*Smiling.*]

That may be,
But they're the m o s t, who follow me.

[*Goes.*

BRAND.

[*Looking after him.*]

A people's champion thorough-bred!
Active, with fair and open hand,
Honest of heart and sound of head,

But yet a scourge upon the land!
No avalanche, no winter-blast,
No flood, nor frost, nor famine-fast
Leaves half the ruin in its rear
That such a man does, year by year.
Life only by a plague is reft;
But he——! How many a thought is cleft,
How many an eager will made numb,
How many a valiant song struck dumb
By such a narrow soul as this!
What smiles on simple faces breaking,
What fires in lowly bosoms waking,
What pangs of joy and anger, seed
That might have ripened into deed,
Die by that bloodless blade of his!
[*Suddenly, in anxiety.*]
But O the summons! the summons!—No!
It is the Doctor!

Enter DOCTOR.

[*Hurries to meet him.*]
Say! say! How——?

THE DOCTOR.

She stands before her Maker now.

BRAND.

Dead!—But repentant?

THE DOCTOR.

Scarcely so;
She hugg'd Earth's goods with all her heart
Till the Hour struck, and they must part.

BRAND.

[*Looking straight before him in deep emotion.*]
Is here an erring soul undone?

THE DOCTOR.

She will be mildly judged, maybe;—
And Law temper'd with equity.

BRAND.

[*In a low tone.*]
What said she?

THE DOCTOR.

Low she mutter'd: He
Is no hard dealer, like my son.

BRAND.

[*Sinking in anguish upon the bench.*]

Guilt-wrong or dying, still that lie
That every soul is ruin'd by!
[*Hides his face in his ha*

THE DOCTOR.

[*Goes towards him, looks at him, and shakes his hea*

You seek, a day that is no more,
In one and all things to restore.
You think, God's venerable pact
With man is still a living fact;—
Each Age in its own way will walk;
Ours is not scared by nurses' talk
Of hell-bound soul and burning brand;—
Humanity's our first command!

BRAND.

[*Looking up.*]

Humanity!—That sluggard phrase
Is the world's watchword nowadays.
With this each bungler hides the fact
That he dare not and will not act;
With this each weakling masks the lie,
That he'll risk all for victory;
With this each dastard dares to cloak
Vows faintly rued and lightly broke;
Your puny spirits will turn Man
Himself Humanitarian!
Was God "humane" when Jesus died?
Had y o u r God then his counsel given,
Christ at the cross for grace had cried—
And the Redemption signified
A diplomatic note from Heaven.
[*Hides his head, and sits in mute grief.*

THE DOCTOR.

[*Softly.*]

Rage, rage thy fill, thou soul storm-stress'd;—
Best were it for thee to find tears.

AGNES.

[*Comes out on to the steps: pale and terrified, she whispers to the* DOCTOR.]

In! Follow me!

THE DOCTOR.

You raise my fears!
What is it, child?

AGNES.

Into my breast
Creeps cold a serpent of affright——!

THE DOCTOR.

What is it?

AGNES.

[*Pulling him away.*]

Come!—Great God of Might!

[*They go into the house;* BRAND *does not notice.*

BRAND.

[*To himself.*]

Impenitent alive,—and dead!
This is the finger of the Lord!
Now through my means shall be restored
The treasure she has forfeited;
Else tenfold woe upon my head!

[*Rises.*]

Henceforth as by my sonship bound,
Unflinching, on my native ground
I'll battle, a soldier of the Cross,
For Spirit's gain by Body's loss!
Me with His purging fire the Lord
Hath arm'd, and with His riving Word:
Mine is that Will and that strong Trust
That crumbles mountains into dust!

THE DOCTOR.

[*Followed by* AGNES, *comes hastily out, and cries.*]

Order your house and haste away!

BRAND.

Were there an earthquake I would stay!

THE DOCTOR.

Then you have doom'd your child to death.

BRAND.

[*Wildly.*]

The child! Alf! Alf! What phantom wraith
Of fear is this! My child!
[*Is about to rush into the house.*

THE DOCTOR.

[*Holding him back.*]

Stay, stay.—
Here summer sunshine pierces not,
Here polar ice-blasts rive and rend,—
Here dank and stifling mists descend.
Another winter in this spot
Will shrivel the tender life away.
Go hence, you'll save him! No delay!
To-morrow's best.

BRAND.

To-night,—to-day!
Now, ere another hour is out!
O yet he shall grow strong and stout;—
No blast from mountain or from shore
Shall chill his baby-bosom more.
Come, Agnes, lift him gently in sleep!
Away along the winding deep!

O Agnes, Agnes, death has spun
His web about our little son!

AGNES.

Foreboding trembled in my heart,—
And yet I only knew a part.

BRAND.

[*To* THE DOCTOR.]

But flight will save him? That is sure?

THE DOCTOR.

The life a father day and night
Watches, all perils can endure.
Be all to him! and healthy, bright,
You soon shall see him, be secure!

BRAND.

Thanks, thanks!

[*To* AGNES.]

In down enclose him well;
Chill sweeps the night-wind from the fell.

[AGNES *goes in.*

The DOCTOR *silently watches* BRAND, *who gazes fixedly through the door; then goes to him, and lays his hand on his shoulder.*

THE DOCTOR.

So tender to his own distress.
And to the world so merciless!
For them avails not m o r e nor l e s s!
Only Law's absolute N o u g h t or A l l,

But now—no sooner sees he fall
The dooming lot,—his valour's flown;
—The sacrificial lamb's his own!

BRAND.

What mean you?

THE DOCTOR.

In the dying ear
You thunder'd the decree of fear:
To perish, unless All she gave,
And went down naked to the grave!
And that cry rang again, again,
When need was direst among men!
You're now the shipwreckt sailor, cleaving
To swamp'd boat through the storms of doom,
And from its upturn'd bottom heaving
To see your tracts on Wrath to Come,
To sea, to sea, the bulky tome
That struck your Brothers' bosoms home;
Now you ask only wind and wave
To waft your infant from death's reach.
Fly, only fly, by bay and beach,
Fly from your very mother's grave,—
Fly from the souls you're sent to save;—
"The Parson does not mean to preach!"

BRAND.

[*Wildly clutching his head as if to gather his thoughts.*]

Am I now blind? Or was I?

THE DOCTOR.

Nay,
A father has no other way;

Don't fancy that your act I blame;
I hold you greater, clipt and tame,
Than in your giant strength secure.—
Farewell! I've held you up a glass;
Use it and sigh: "Alas, alas,
Is this a Titan's portraiture?" [*Goes.*

BRAND.

[*Gazing a while before him: then bursts out.*]

Before—or now,—when did I stray?

AGNES *comes out with a cloak over her shoulders and the child in her arms;* BRAND *does not see her; she is about to speak, but stands petrified with terror at the look in his face. At the same moment* A MAN *comes in hastily through the garden-gate. The sun is setting.*

THE MAN.

Hark, priest, you have a foe!

BRAND.

[*Clenching his hand against his breast.*]

Yes, here!

THE MAN.

Watch well the Mayor. The seed you sow
Sprang ever bravely into ear,
Till blighting slanders laid it low.
With meaning hints he has implied
That by-and-by this house would lack
A tenant, and you'd turn your back,
The day your wealthy mother died.

BRAND.

And if it were so——

THE MAN.

Priest, I know you;
Know, why these poisonous tales are rife;
You stood against him still at strife;
He could not bend your purpose;—lo, you,
That's what these slanders signified——

BRAND.

[*Hesitating.*]

Suppose the case—that he spoke true?

THE MAN.

Then to us all you've basely lied.

BRAND.

Have I——?

THE MAN.

How oft you've told us, you,
That God has call'd you to the strife,
That here you've made your home for life,
That h e r e you'll bear the battle through,
That none may shirk the call to serve,
That all must fight and never swerve,
Y o u have the Call! How flames and flashes
In many a heart the fire you've fed!

BRAND.

This people's heart is hard and dead!
Their ear is deaf, their fire is ashes!

THE MAN.

O, you know better;—radiant day
To many a heart has found its way.

BRAND.

In tenfold others all is night.

THE MAN.

You're sent to be their beacon-light,
But be the numbers as you choose,
Here is no need to closely scan;
For here I stand, one only Man,
And bid you: Leave us, if you can!
I have a soul I would not lose,
Like others; books I cannot use,
You bore me from the depths below,—
Try if you now can let me go!
You cannot,—I so closely grip,
My soul were lost if I should slip
Farewell; I look to learn at last;
My priest by me—and God—stands fast. [*Goes.*

AGNES.

[*Timidly.*]

Your lips are blanch'd, and white your cheek;
You seem to utter an inward shriek!

BRAND.

Each strong word flung at yonder rock
Thrills back with tenfold echo's shock.

AGNES.

[*Advancing a step.*]

I'm ready!

BRAND.

Ready? Whereunto?

AGNES.

[*Vehemently.*]

For what a mother needs must do!

GERD.

[*Runs by outside and stops at the garden-gate; claps her hands and cries in wild joy.*]

Have you heard? The priest's flown off.—
Up from hillocks, out of howes,
Swarm the demons and the Drows,
Black and ugly, big and little—
Ugh, how fierce they cut and cuff—!
Half my eye away they whittle;
Half my soul they've carried off;
With the stump I'll e'en make shift,
It will serve me well enough!

BRAND.

Girl, your thoughts are all adrift;
See, I stand before you.

GERD.

You?
Ay, but not the parson! Swift
From the peak my falcon flew,

Fiercely down the fells he hied him,
He was bitted and saddled too,
Through the nightfall blast he hiss'd,
And a man was set astride him,—
'Twas the parson, 'twas the priest!
Now the valley church is bare,
Lock and bar are bolted there;
Ugly-church's day is past;
M i n e shall get its due at last.
There the priest stands, tall and strong;
Snowy surplice swathes his flank,
Woven of winter's drip and dank,
If you'd see him, come along;
Parish-church is bare and blank;
M y priest has so brave a song,
That the whole earth rings to hear it.

BRAND.

Who has bidden thee, shatter'd spirit,
Lure me with this idol-lay?

GERD.

[*Coming into the garden.*]

Idols, idols? What are they?
Oho! That is what you mean:
Giant or pigmy, large or lean,
Always gilded, always gay.
Idols! Look you where she stands!
See you 'neath her mantle stray
Baby-feet and baby-hands?
See you how those robes are gay,
That close-folded something keep
Like a little child asleep?

Back she shudders! Hides her son!
Idols?—Man, I show you o n e!

AGNES.

Have you tears, Brand? Can you pray?
Terror scorches mine away!

BRAND.

Woe's me, Agnes—I forbode
In her words the voice of God.

GERD.

Hark; now all the bells are loud,
Clanging down the savage fells!
See, what moving masses crowd
Upwards to those bidding bells!
See the thousand trolls uprisen
From the ocean-caves, their prison;
See the thousand dwarfs up-leaping
From the graves where they were sleeping
With the priest's seal on them set:
Grave and ocean cannot bind them,
Out they're swarming, chill and wet;—
Troll-babes that but shammed to die,
Grinning roll the rocks behind them:
"Mother, father!" hark, they cry;
Goodman, Goodwife, make reply;
Then, as fathers among sons,
Move among their buried ones;
Women lay their risen dead
At their bosoms to be fed,
Strutted scarce with prouder front
When they bore them to the font.
Life begins! The parson's fled!

BRAND.

Get thee from me! Direr still
Grows the vision——

GERD.

Hark, he's mocking!
He that sits by yon way-border,
Where it rears to scale the hill,
All their names as they go flocking
In his book he writes in order;—
Ho! he's wellnigh all the pack;
For the parish-church is bare,
Lock and bar are bolted there,—
And parson's off on falcon-back!

[*Leaps over the garden-fence and is lost in the moraine. Stillness.*

AGNES.

[*Approaches, and says in a low voice.*]

Late we linger: let us go.

BRAND.

[*Looking fixedly at her.*]

Shall our way be——
[*Points first to the garden-gate, then to the house-door.*]
So?—or so?

AGNES.

[*Starts back shuddering.*]

Brand, your child,—your child!

BRAND.

[*Following her.*]

Say rather:
Was I priest ere I was father?

AGNES.

[*Drawing further back.*]

Though in thunder-crash it peal'd,
Unto that my lips are seal'd.

BRAND.

[*Following.*]

You are Mother: it is due
That the last word come from you.

AGNES.

I am Wife: I shall fulfil
All that you have heart to will.

BRAND.

[*Trying to grasp her arm.*]

Take the Cup of Choice from me!

AGNES.

[*Retreating behind the tree.*]

Mother then I should not be!

BRAND.

There a Judgment is let fall!

AGNES.

[*Vehemently.*]

Have you any choice at all!

BRAND.

Still the Judgment, gathering force!

AGNES.

Trust you wholly in God's Call?

BRAND.

Yes!

[*Grasps her hand firmly.*]

And now 'tis yours to give
Final sentence: Die or live!

AGNES.

Go where God has fix'd your course. [*Pause.*

BRAND.

Late we linger; let us go.

AGNES.

[*Voiceless.*]

Shall our way be——?

BRAND.

[*Silent.*]

AGNES.

[*Pointing to the garden-gate.*]

So?

BRAND.

[*Pointing to the house-door.*]

Nay,—so!

AGNES.

[*Raising the child aloft in her arms.*]

God! The gift Thou canst require
I can lift it to thy sight!
Guide me through life's martyr-fire!

[*Goes in.*

BRAND.

[*Gazes a while before him, bursts into tears, clasps his hands over his head, throws himself down on the steps and cries:*]

Jesus, Jesus! give me light!

ACT FOURTH

Christmas Eve in the Manse. The room is dark. Garden-door in the background; a window on one side, a door on the other. AGNES, *in mourning, stands at the window and gazes out into the darkness.*

AGNES.

Still he comes not! Comes not yet!—
Oh, how hard, with gloom beset,—
Still to wait and still to cry,—
Winning never a reply!—
Fast they fall, the softly sifted
Snowflakes; in a shroud-like woof
They have swathed the old church roof——
[*Listens.*]
Hark! the garden-latch is lifted!
Steps! A man's step, firm and fast!
[*Hurries to the door and opens it.*]
Is it thou? Come home! At last!

BRAND *comes in, snowy, in travelling dress, which he removes during what follows.*

AGNES.

[*Throwing her arms about him.*]

Oh, how long thou wast away!
Go not from me, go not from me;

All alone I cannot sway
The black clouds that overcome me;
What a night, what days have been
These two—and the night between!

BRAND.

I am with thee, child, once more.
[*He lights a single candle, which throws a pale radiance over the room.*]
Thou art pale.

AGNES.

And worn and sad.
I have watch'd and long'd so sore;
And this little leafy bough—
Little, it was all I had,
Saved from summer until now
To bedeck our Christmas-tree,—
I have hung it there, Brand, see!
His the bush was, so we said;
Ah, 'twas his—it crown'd him dead!
[*Bursts into tears.*]
Look, from the snow it peers
Yonder, his—O God——

BRAND.

His grave.

AGNES.

O that word!

BRAND.

Have done with tears.

AGNES.

Yes—be patient—I'll be brave!
But my soul is bleeding still,
And the wound is raw and new—
Sapp'd is all my strength of will.
Oh, but better shall ensue!
Once these days are overworn,
Thou shalt never see me mourn!

BRAND.

Keep'st thou so God's holy Night?

AGNES.

Ah! Too much thou must not crave!
Think—last year so sweet and bright,
This year carried from my sight;
Carried—carried——

BRAND.

[*Loudly.*]

To the grave!

AGNES.

[*Shrieks.*]

Name it not!

BRAND.

With lungs that crack,
Named it must be, if thou shrink—
Named, till echo rolls it back,
Like a billow from the brink.

AGNES.

Ah! The word gives thee, too, pain.
How-so passionless thou boast thee!
On thy brow I see the stain
Of the agony it cost thee!

BRAND.

On my brow the drops that lie
Are but sea-spray from the storm.

AGNES.

And that dewdrop in thine eye,
Has it fallen from the sky?
No, ah! no, it is too warm,
'Tis thy heart's dew!

BRAND.

Agnes, wife,
Let us bravely face the strife;
Stand together, never flinch,
Struggle onward, inch by inch.
Oh, I felt a man out there!
Surges o'er the reef were dashing;
Horror of the storm-lit air
Still'd the sea-gull; hail was thrashing
Down upon the boiling sea.
In my skiff, that mid-fjord quiver'd,
Mast and tackle creak'd and shiver'd,
Tatter'd sails blew far a-lee,
Scarce a shred of them remaining,
Every nail and stanchion straining!
From the beetling summits sunder'd.
Down the avalanches thunder'd;

Stiff and stark, with corpse-like faces
Sat the rowers in their places.
Then the soul in me wax'd high;
From the helm I ruled them all,
Knowing well that One thereby
Had baptized me to His call!

AGNES.

In the tempest to be strong,
Eager in the stress of fight,
That is easy, that is light;
Think of me, who, all day long,
Still must croon without relief
The low swallow-song of grief;
Think of me, who have no charm
For the tedious pain of life;
Me, who, far from war's alarm,
Lack the fiery joys of strife:
Think, oh think, of me, who share not
Noble work, but brood and wait;
Me, who to remember dare not,
And who never can forget!

BRAND.

Thou no noble life-work! Thou!
Never was it great as now.
Listen, Agnes; thou shalt know
What to me our loss has brought.
Oftentimes my light is low,
Dim my reason, dull my thought,
And there seems a kind of gladness
In immeasurable sadness.
Agnes—in such hours I see

God, as at no other, near;
Oh, so near, it seems to me
I could speak, and He would hear.
Like a lost child then I long
To be folded to his breast,
And be gather'd by His strong
Tender Father-arms to rest!

AGNES.

Brand, oh see Him so alway!
To thy supplication near—
God of love and not of fear!

BRAND.

No; I may not bar his way,
Nor run counter to my Call;
I must see Him vast, sublime
As the heavens,—a pigmy Time
Needs a giant God withal!
Oh, but t h o u mayst see Him near,
See Him as a Father dear,
Bow Thy head upon His breast,
There, when thou art weary, rest,
Then return, with face aglow
From His presence, fair and free,
Bear His glory down to me
Worn with battle-thrust and throe!
See, my Agnes; so to share
Is the soul of wedded life:
His, the turmoil and the strife,
Hers the healing and the care;
This and this alone, the true
Wedlock, that makes one of two.

Since thou turnedst from the life
Of the world to be my wife,
Boldly cast thy lot with me,
This the work appointed thee:
Mine the stir and stress of fight,
Battle in the burning sun,
Watching in the winter night;
But for thee, when all is done,
To my parching lips to hold
Love's full wine-cup, and to fold
'Neath the breastplate's iron stress
The soft robe of tenderness.
Surely that work is not light!

AGNES.

Every work that I have sought
Is too hard for my weak skill;
All the fibres of my will
Gather round a single thought.
Like a vision seems it still:
Let me have of tears my fill.
Help me so myself to see,—
What I am, and ought to be!
Brand,—last night, in stillest hush,
Open'd he my chamber door,
On his cheek a rosy flush,
And his little shirt he wore,—
Toddled so with childish tread
To the couch where I lay lonely,
"Mother!" call'd to me, and spread
Both his arms, and smiled, but only
As if praying: "Make me warm."
Yea, I saw!—Oh, my heart bled——

BRAND.

Agnes!

AGNES.

Ah, his little form
Was a-cold, Brand! Needs it must,
Pillow'd in the chilly dust.

BRAND.

That which lies beneath the sod
Is the c o r s e; the c h i l d ' s with God.

AGNES.

[*Shrinking from him.*]

Oh, canst thou without remorse
Thus our bleeding anguish tear?
What thou sternly call'st the corse—
Ah, to me, my child is t h e r e!
Where is body, there is soul:
These apart I cannot keep,
Each is unto me the whole;
Alf beneath the snow asleep
Is my very Alf in heaven!

BRAND.

Many a raw wound must be riven
Ere thy deep disease give way.

AGNES.

Yet have patience with me, pray,
Let me follow, not be driven.
Give me thy strong hand and guide me

Oh, and gently, gently chide me!
Thou whose voice in thunder-tones
Vibrates in the hour of strife,
For the soul that still with groans
Fights a fight for very life,
Hast thou no soft, piteous lay,
To beguile its pangs away?
Ne'er a message to uplift,
Point me to the dawn-fired rift?
God, as thou wouldst have me view Him,
Is a monarch on His throne.
How dare I, then, turn unto Him
With my lowly mother's moan?

BRAND.

Wouldst thou rather, haply, turn
To the God thou knew'st before?

AGNES.

Never, never, nevermore!
And yet oftentimes I yearn
Towards the daybreak, towards the light,
Towards the sunshine warm and golden.
Oh, the ancient saw is right:
"Lightly lifted, hardly holden."
All too vast this realm of thine,
Too gigantic to be mine.
Thou, thy word, thy work, thy goal,
Will austere, and steadfast soul,
Overhead the beetling height,
And the barrier fjord below,
Grief and memory, toil and night,
All vast,—were the Church but so!

BRAND.

[*Starting.*]

What! the Church? Again that thought?
Is it bred an instinct blind
In the air?

AGNES.

[*Shaking her head sadly.*]

Oh ask me not
To find reasons for my thought.
Instinct steals upon the sense
Like a perfume,—to and fro,
Blowing whither? Blowing whence?
I perceive it, that is all;
And, unknowing, yet I know
That for me it is too small.

BRAND.

Truth may be from dreams divined.
In a hundred hearts I find
Self-begotten this one word;
Even in hers, whose frantic call
From the mountain-side I heard:
"It is ugly, for 'tis small!"
So she said; and like the rest
Left her meaning half-express'd.
Then of women came a score,
"Yes, it is too small," they cried;
They would have it spread and soar,
Like a palace in its pride.
Agnes—ah! I see it clear;
Thou the woman art whom God

Gave me for His angel-guide.
Safe alike from doubt and fear
Through the darkness thou hast trod,
Keeping still the even way,
Where I blindly went astray.
Thee no glamour captivated—
Once thy finger show'd the fated
Region where my life-work waited,
Check'd me, as I sought sublime,
To the vault of heaven to climb,
Turn'd my soaring glance within,
And that kingdom bade me win.
Now, a second time, thy word
Penetrates my soul like day,
Guides me where I vainly err'd,
Glorifies my weary way.
Small the Church is? Be it so:
Then a greater Church shall grow.
Never, never did I wot
All God gave me, giving thee;
Now that cry of thine's for me:
Leave me not! Oh leave me not!

AGNES.

All my sorrow I will quell,
I will dry the tears that well,
Seal in still sepulchral sleep
Memory's lone castle-keep;
Lay oblivion like a sea
Open between it and me,
I will blot the joyous gleams
From my little world of dreams,
Live, thy wife, alone for thee!

BRAND.

Steep the path is, high the goal.

AGNES.

Lead, nor sternly spur, my soul!

BRAND.

In a greater name I call.

AGNES.

One of whom thou saidst that still
He accepts the steadfast will,
Though the flesh be weak withal! [*Going.*

BRAND.

Whither, Agnes?

AGNES.

[*Smiles.*]

Ah, to-day
Home must have its feast array!
Thou my lavishness didst chide,
Mindest thou, last Christmastide?
All the chamber flash'd with lights,
From the Christmas-tree there hung
Toys and wreaths and quaint delights;
There was laughter, there was song.
Brand, for us this year also
Shall the Christmas-candles glow,
Here shall all be deck'd and dight
For the great, still Feast to-night!
Here, if haply God should peep,

He of meek and lowly mind
Shall His stricken children find,
Babes, that humbly understand,
To have felt their Father's hand
Gives them not a right to weep.—
Seest thou now of tears a sign?

BRAND.

[*Presses her to him a moment.*]

Child, make light: that work is thine.

AGNES.

[*Smiles sadly.*]

Thou thy greater Church shalt rear:
Oh—but end ere Spring is here! [*Goes.*

BRAND.

Willing in her torments still,
Willing at the martyr's stake;
Flesh may flag and spirit break,
But unbroken in her Will.
Lord, to her poor strength add Thine;—
Be the cruel task not mine
At Thy bidding to unchain
Angry vultures of the Law,
Swift to swoop with ravening maw,
And her heart's warm blood to drain!
I have strength to stand the strain.
Twofold agony let me bear,—
But be merciful to her!

A knock at the outer door. THE MAYOR *enters*

THE MAYOR.

A beaten man, I seek your door.

BRAND.

A beaten man?

THE MAYOR.

As such I stand
Before you. When I open'd war,
And sought to drive you from the land,
The end I augur'd, I confess,
For you, was not just—well—success.

BRAND.

Indeed——?

THE MAYOR.

But though my cause I boast
The better, I'll contend no more.

BRAND.

And why?

THE MAYOR.

Because you have the most.

BRAND.

Have I?

THE MAYOR.

Oh, that you can't ignore:
Folks flock to you by sea and shore;
And in the whole of my confine
A spirit has of late been rife,

Which, God's my witness, is not mine;
Whence to conclude is only due,
That it originates with you.
Here is my hand: we'll end the strife!

BRAND.

War such as we wage does not cease,
Howe'er the vanquish'd cry "No more!"

THE MAYOR.

Why, what should be the end of war
But reasonable terms of peace?
To kick at pricks is not my way,
I'm made of common human clay;
When at your breast the lance you feel
It is but reason to give place;—
With but a switch to parry steel,
'Tis just to make a volte-face;
Left of your cause the sole defender,
It is the wisest to surrender.

BRAND.

Two things are noticeable here.
First, that you call me strong. Of men
I have the larger part.

THE MAYOR.

That's clear.

BRAND.

Now, possibly: but when shall rise
The great dread day of sacrifice,
Who will have more supporters t h e n ?

THE MAYOR.

Of sacrifice? Why, goodness me,
That's just the day we never see!
At least, the sacrifice no worse is
Than drafts upon good people's purses;
The age is too humane to bring
Any more costly offering.
And what's most vexing is, that I
Myself have all along been noted
Of those who the Humane promoted
And hinder'd sacrifice thereby.
So that it may be fairly said,
I've put the axe to my own head,
Or, at the least, laid rods in store
To baffle all I've struggled for.

BRAND.

You may be right. But, furthermore,
I hardly know how you can dare
Surrender your own cause as lost.
Be rods, or be they not, the cost,
Man's work is what he's fashion'd for,
And Paradise, for him, lies t h e r e.
'Twixt him and it though oceans swell,
And close at hand lie Satan's quarter,
May he for that cry "Toil, farewell—
The way to hell's distinctly shorter!"?

THE MAYOR.

To that I answer: Yes and No.
Some final haven man must win;—
If all our toil brings nothing in,
Who on a barren quest will go?

The fact stands thus: we want reward
For every labour, light or hard;
And if in arms we miss the prize,—
We gain our point by compromise.

BRAND.

But b l a c k will never turn to w h i t e !

THE MAYOR.

Respected friend, the gain is slight
Of saying: "White as yonder brae,"
When the mob's shouting: "Black as snow!"

BRAND.

You join them, possibly?

THE MAYOR.

Why, no—
I rather shout, not black, but g r a y ,
The time's humane; asks apt compliance,
Not blunt and absolute defiance.
We stand on democratic ground,
Where what the people thinks is right;
Shall o n e against the mass propound
His special views on black and white?
In short, you, having a majority,
Are best entitled to authority.
So I submit, as they submitted,
With you my humble lot I cast,
And may I by no soul be twitted
For not contending to the last!
Folks now consider, I perceive,

Petty and poor all I achieve;
They say there's something of more worth
Than richer harvests wrung from earth;
They are not willing as they were,
The necessary mite to spare;
And the best cause, if will's not in it,—
There's very little hope to win it.
Believe me, 'tis no easy thing
To drop one's plans for roads and bridges,
For tapping meres and draining ridges,
And more besides that was in swing.
But, good Lord, what's a man to say?
If he can't win, he must give way;
Patiently trust that Time's his friend,
And to the blast astutely bend.
Now,—the folks' favour I've foregone
In just the way it first was won;
Ay, ay,—and by another track
I'll get my old possession back.

BRAND.

So all your cunning, all your art,
Aim'd but to win the people's heart?

THE MAYOR.

God help me, no! The common good
And profit of this neighbourhood
Has been my single, sole desire.
But, I admit, there did conspire
The worker's hope of worthy hire
For day's work honestly pursued.
The fact stands thus: a resolute
And able man, with sense to boot,

Demands to see his labour's fruit,
And not to drudge and sweat and groan
To profit an Idea alone.
With the best will I can't afford
To throw my interests overboard,
And give my brains without reward.
I've a large household to supply,
A wife, and of grown girls a store,
Who must be first provided for;—
Belly that's empty, throat that's dry,
The i d e a scarce will satisfy
Where mouths so many must be fill'd.
And any man who should demur,
For him I have but one reply,—
He's an unworthy householder.

BRAND.

And now your object is—?

THE MAYOR.

To build.

BRAND.

To b u i l d ?

THE MAYOR.

Why, yes,—the common state
To better, and my own to boot.
First I will build up the repute
I stood in till a recent date:—
The elections soon will be on foot:—
So I must set some scheme afloat,
Some booming enterprise promote;
Thus I regain my lost authority,
And check the wane of my majority.

Now, I've reflected, to compete
With wind and tide wins no man's praises;
The folk want "lifting," as the phrase is,
A work for which I'm all unmeet;
I can but set them on their feet;
Which can't be done unless they please,—
And here all are my enemies!
Whence I've resolved since such the case is,
After ripe thought, to find a basis
For making war with poverty

BRAND.

You would uproot it?

THE MAYOR.

No, not I!
It is a necessary ill
In every state: we must endure it;
Yet may we, with a little skill,
In certain forms confine, secure it,
If only we begin in time.
He who would grow a bed of crime,
Let him with poverty manure it:
I'll set a dam to this manure!

BRAND.

How?

THE MAYOR.

Do you take me? I can cure
A want, of long and bitter proof,
By building, for the Town's behoof,
A Pest-house for the afflicted Poor.

Pest-house I call a thing projected
To rid us of the crime-infected.
And, I reflected, to the Pest-house
Might well be added an Arrest-house,
The cause with its effect confined
The selfsame bars and bolts behind,
And nothing but a wall between.
And, while my hand is in, I mean
In the same block to build withal
A wing for balls and ballotings,
Social and business gatherings,
With platform and Assembly-Hall;
In short, a half-political,
Half-social, smart and festive Guest-house.

BRAND.

Sorely required; this most of all;
But yet there's o n e thing needed more.

THE MAYOR.

You mean a Mad-house? Yes, indeed;
A very peremptory need;
That was my own idea before.
But now, by friendly counsel wrought,
I've utterly renounced the thought;
For who's to furnish the supplies
For such a giant enterprise?
To put a Mad-house up would come,
Believe me, to a pretty sum,
If all whom need and merit fitted,
Should be within its walls admitted.
We must not build for our caprice,
But note Time's current as it glides;—
The world moves on with giant strides,

Last year abundance, famine this;
You see to what a monstrous girth
The folks' necessities have swell'd,
Talents for everything on earth,
Headlong by seven-league boots propell'd,
Are swarming madly to the birth.
Thus it would be too dear a jest
To build posterity a nest
And let self, wife, and children go;
This tooth, I say, we can't afford:
Out with it, therefore, by the Lord!

BRAND.

And then, there's the great Hall, you know,
For any madder than the rest.

THE MAYOR.

[*Delighted.*]

Yes, it would mostly be to spare!
Why, Brand, you've hit the nail-head there!
If fortunate our project's fate is,
We get to boot—a Mad-house gratis;
Here, shelter'd by the selfsame roof,
And by the selfsame flag defended,
All the essential strands are blended
That tinge and tone our social woof.
Here in one haven disembogues
The flood of Paupers and of Rogues;
With Lunatics who roam'd at large,
Subject to no man's check or charge;
Here too our Freedom's highest reach,
The election-strife, the storm of speech;
And here our Council-Hall, for framing

Measures to meet each public pest;
And here our Feast-Hall, for proclaiming
How well we'll guard the Past's bequest.
You see, then, if our project stand,
The Cragsman has at his command
All he in reason can demand,—
The right to live as he thinks best.
God knows, how slender our resources,
But once our enterprise in force is,
I trust we may be with impunity
Styled a well-organised community.

BRAND.

But then the means—?

THE MAYOR.

Ay, there's the knot,
As in all other things, in this.
Hardly to contributions wrought
Is Will, and if your help I miss,
I furl my flag without a thought:
But with your eloquent alliance
I'll bid all obstacles defiance,
And when all's done, your kind compliance,
Believe me, shall not be forgot.

BRAND.

In short, you'd b u y me.

THE MAYOR.

For my aim
I should prefer another name:
I seek, with general good in view,

That gulf of difference to cross
Which you from me and me from you
Has sever'd, to our common loss.

BRAND.

In an ill-omen'd hour you came——

THE MAYOR.

Unfortunately yes, I own it:
Your recent loss,—I might have known it,
But your brave bearing re-assured me,
And need of public credit lured me.

BRAND.

In grievous or in gladsome season
I render help where need is plain;
But, for another weighty reason,
This time your mission is in vain.

THE MAYOR.

And which, pray—?

BRAND.

I am building too.

THE MAYOR.

You building? You adopt my view?

BRAND.

Not altogether.
[*Pointing out of the window.*]
Do you see?

THE MAYOR.

Yonder?

BRAND.

Yes.

THE MAYOR.

That great ugly stall?—
Why, that's the Parsonage granary.

BRAND.

No, not that;—but the ugly, s m a l l——

THE MAYOR.

The Church?

BRAND.

I mean to build it g r e a t.

THE MAYOR.

That, by the devil! you shall not!
No man shall alter it one jot!
My plan 'twould utterly frustrate.
Mine's urgent, only waits the word,
By yours I'm absolutely floor'd;
Two weapons can't at once be wielded,
Yield therefore—!

BRAND.

I have never yielded.

THE MAYOR.

You must, man, here. Build my Arrest-house,
My Pest-house and my festive Guest-house,
Build all, the Mad-house comprehending,

And who'll ask, where the Church wants mending?
And why condemn it now to fall?
'Twas well enough a while ago.

BRAND.

Possibly; now it is too small.

THE MAYOR.

I never saw it full, I know.

BRAND.

Even a single soul is scanted,
And has not room therein to soar.

THE MAYOR.

[*Shaking his head in amazement.*]

(Which single soul but proves the more
How sorely my Asylum's wanted.)
[*Changing his tone.*]
Let the Church be, is my advice.
One may regard it, in some wise,
As a rich heirloom of our age;
In fact, a noble heritage,
Which we not lightly may remove.
Nay, if my building project crashes,
I, like a Phoenix from the ashes,
Will live again in public love,
As one chivalrously intent
To save our ancient monument!
Here stood a heathen fane of old,—
'Twas in King Belë's reign, no doubt;
Then, later heroes more devout

Founded the Church with looted gold.
All-sacred in its antique dress,
Grand in its simple stateliness,
Till our own days it tower'd sublime——

BRAND.

But all these glories of old time
Lie long since buried deep in mould,
Of all surviving sign bereft.

THE MAYOR.

Just so! They are so very old
That not a trace of them is left.
But in my late grandfather's day
A wall-hole still defied decay!

BRAND.

A wall-hole?

THE MAYOR.

Fit to hold a tun!

BRAND.

But the wall's self?

THE MAYOR.

Oh, that was gone.
In plain terms then, I am compell'd
To say, your scheme is out of court:—
A barbarous and unparallel'd
Horrible sacrilege, in short.
And then the money,—do you dream

These folks are so profuse in spending,
That they'll contrive new cost by lending
Existence to a half-hatch'd scheme?
When with a little deftness they
May so far patch the crumbling wall
That in o u r time it will not fall?
But just go out!—the field survey,—
You'll find, I'm winner after all.

BRAND.

From no man will I wring a jot
To give my God house-harbourage:
With my own goods it shall be wrought;
In that one work my heritage
To the last penny shall be spent.—
Now, Mayor, are you still confident
That you can shake me from my thought?

THE MAYOR.

[*With folded hands.*]

I stand—as from the clouds dropp'd down!
Such things are even in a Town
Scarce heard of,—and yet here, for us,
Who long to the necessitous
Have closed our purses and our doors,
You loose this flood of gifts unbounded
That ripples, flashes, foams and pours—.
—No, Brand, I'm utterly dumbfounded!

BRAND.

In thought I long ago resign'd
My wealth——

THE MAYOR.

Yes, whisper'd hints have flown
Pointing to something of the kind.
But I regarded them as wind.
How many men give all they own
Without a tangible return?
However, that's your own concern.—
Go on! I'll follow. You're in feather,
You can act freely, work and sway.—
Brand, we will build the Church t o g e t h e r!

BRAND.

What, you are willing to give way?

THE MAYOR.

Dear God's my witness, that I am!
And shall be while my wits are sound!
When o n e would fatten, pamper, cram,—
Another milk and shear and flay,—
Where, think you, will the flock be found?
Death and destruction, I'm your man!
I'm fire and fury for the plan!
Thrill'd, agitated, nay, affected!
Providence prompted the design
That led me to your door to-night,
For sure, without the hint of m i n e
Y o u r plan had scarcely been projected,
Or, at the least, scarce seen the light!
And thus the Church, conceived aright,
Will by m y means have been erected!

BRAND.

But, don't forget, we must lay low
That towering relic of the past!

THE MAYOR.

[*Looking out.*]

Seen in the twofold glimmer cast
By the new moon and the fresh snow,
It seems a sort of—rubbish-heap.

BRAND.

What, Mayor!

THE MAYOR.

It is too old to keep!
I fail entirely to explain it,
Till now it never struck my eye,—
The weathercock stands all awry;
It would be monstrous to retain it.
And where are architecture, style,
Rightly regarded, in the pile?
What terms can give that arch its due?
An architect would call it v i l e ;—
And really I must share his view.
And then that roof with moss-tufts blowing,—
Bless me, they're none of Belë's growing.
No, we may overmuch assert
The reverence for ancient glories!
One fact, at least, there's no o'erthrowing,
That this old rotten hut no more is
But just a very heap of dirt!

BRAND.

But if the people's voice should storm
At those who seek to lay it low—?

THE MAYOR.

I will it though they all cry No.
This Christmas with the least delay

I'll put the thing in proper form,
And launch it smoothly on its way.
I'll write, I'll agitate, I'll sway!
Ay, ay—you know the stuff I'm made of!
And if I cannot hire or hound
The foolish flock to help to end it,
With my own hands I'll rive and rend it,
Timber by timber, to the ground.
Nay, though I had to call the aid of
My wife and all my girls as well,
Down it should come, by death and hell

BRAND.

This language has another sound
Than that which earlier from you fell.

THE MAYOR.

To be humane is to repress
All manner of One-sidedness.
And sure, if truth the poet utters,
Precisely what is to be sought
In thinking is "the winged thought,"—
That is to say—the thought that flutters.
Farewell.
[*Taking his hat.*]
I have to see the band.

BRAND.

The what?

THE MAYOR.

Just think, within our land
This morning two of us laid hand
On a foul-favour'd gipsy horde,

So I got help with rope and cord,
And now they're in your neighbour's ward
Next to the North, but—devil clip me!—
If just a couple didn't slip me——

BRAND.

The bells are ringing: Peace to Men.

THE MAYOR.

Why came this hell-brood hither, then?
Yet in a sense, they are, 'tis true,
Kin to this parish,—
[*Laughing.*]
Nay to y o u
Hark to a riddle: read it right,
If you have power and appetite.
There be, who in effect derive
From her, by whom you are alive,
But owe their actual origin
To coming of another kin.

BRAND.

[*Shaking his head.*]

O God, so many riddles rise
Before our baffled, helpless eyes!

THE MAYOR.

But this one's very lightly guess'd.
You must have often, heretofore,
Heard tell one story or another
Of that poor fellow here by West
Whose head four parsons' learning bore;
He went a-wooing to your Mother.

BRAND.

What then?

THE MAYOR.

Conceive,—a girl of gold!
She sent him to the right-about
Promptly, as might have been foretold.
And how d'ye think he took the flout?
Half mad with grief he wander'd out,
Mated at last another bride,
A gipsy,—and, before he died,
Enrich'd with issue this foul band
That sins and starves about the land.
Nay, on this parish he conferr'd
One bastard imp—as souvenir
Of his illustrious career.

BRAND.

Namely—?

THE MAYOR.

The gipsy-urchin Gerd.

BRAND.

[*In muffled tones.*]

Ah—so!

THE MAYOR.

[*Gaily.*]

Confess, the riddle's good!
His issue in effect derive
From her by whom you are alive;
For the first cause of all the brood
Was, that he loved and she withstood.

BRAND.

Advise me, Mayor; can you tell
Some means of giving them relief?

THE MAYOR.

Tut, clap them in a Bridewell cell.
They're overhead in debt to hell;
To save them were to play the thief
With Satan, who will lose his trade
If earth restore not what he made.

BRAND.

You plann'd to build a house, to better
This naked misery and dearth——

THE MAYOR.

That plan was, by its own begetter,
Slain in the moment of its birth.

BRAND.

If after all though—it were well——

THE MAYOR.
[*Smiling.*]

This language has another sound
Than that which earlier from you fell.
[*Clapping him on the shoulder.*]
What's buried, leave it in the ground!
Man must not dash his deed with doubt.
Farewell, farewell, I can't remain,
I must be off and scour the fell,
To seek this nest of truants out.

A merry Yule! We'll meet again!
My greetings to your wife. Farewell! [*Goes.*

BRAND.

[*After a meditative silence.*]

O expiation without end!—
So wildly mingle, strangely blend
The threads that human fortune spin,—
Sin tangled with the fruit of sin,
Pouring its own pollution in,—
That he who eyes their mazy flight
Sees foulest Wrong grow one with Right.
[*Goes to the window, and after a long look out:*]
My little child, lamb without stain,
Thou for thy mother's deed wast slain;
A shatter'd spirit bore His voice
Whose throne the crested heavens sustain,
And bade me cast the die of choice.
And this distracted soul had birth
Because my mother's clave to earth.
Thus the Lord, sowing fruit of crime,
Reaps retribution in His time,
And, reaching down from His high dome,
Strikes the third generation home.
[*Starts back in horror from the window.*]
Yes, God is above all things just,
And retribution is His goal;
Only by sacrifice the soul
Achieves redemption from the dust;
Hard truth, our age appall'd descries,
And, therefore, stubbornly denies.
[*Walks up and down the room.*]
To pray? Ah, pray—a word that slips
Easily over all men's lips;

A coin by all men lightly paid.
What's prayer? In storm and stress to shout
Unto the vague Unknown for aid.
Upon Christ's shoulders beg a place,
And stretch both hands to Heaven for grace—
While knee-deep in the slough of doubt.
Ha! if there needed nothing more
I might like others dare to raise
My hand and batter at His door
Who still is "terrible in praise."—
[*Pauses and reflects.*]
And yet in uttermost despair,
In shuddering sorrow's deepest deep,
When Alf at last had sunk to sleep,
And all his mother's kisses vain
Won not the lost smile back again—
What felt I—if it was not prayer?
Whence came that trance, that ecstasy,
That rushing music, like a blast,
That sang afar and hurried past,
Bore me aloft and set me free?
Was it the ecstasy of prayer?
Did I with God hold converse there?
My anguish—did it reach his ears?
Did he look down and see my tears?
I know not. Barr'd is now the door,
The darkness deeper than before,
And nowhere, nowhere any light!
Yes, She—who, darkling, yet hath sight—
[*Calls in anguish.*]
Light, Agnes—light, if light thou hast!

Agnes opens the door and enters with the lighted Christmas candles; a bright glow falls over the room

BRAND.

Light!

AGNES.

See, the Yule light, Brand, at last!

BRAND.

[*Softly.*]

The Yule light! Ha!

AGNES.

[*Putting them on the table.*]

Have I been slow?

BRAND.

No, no.

AGNES.

Thou must be cold, Brand!

BRAND.

[*Loudly.*]

No.

AGNES.

[*Smiling, fills the stove.*]

How stern! It is thy pride of will,
That scorns the darkness and the chill.

BRAND.

[*Walking up and down.*]

H'm, Will!

AGNES.

[*To herself, as she decks the room.*]

Here must the candles stand.
Last year he stretch'd his tiny hand
After the glancing, dancing light:
He was so joyous and so bright;
He started from his little chair,
And ask'd me if a sun it were.
[*Moves the candles a little.*]
See! now the candle's glow falls—t h e r e !
Now from his bed my boy can see
The window gleaming cheerily;
Now can he peer out of the gloom
Silently into our lit room—
But, ah! the glass is dim; stay, stay—
I'll wipe the dew of tears away
And make it smile—— [*Dries the pane.*

BRAND.

[*Softly as he watches her.*]

When in this breast
Will the wild waters sink to rest?
To rest they m u s t !

AGNES.

[*To herself.*]

How bright the glow,
It seems as though the sundering wall
Had sunk; the low room grown a hall,
The murky world of ice and snow
Sudden become a shelter'd nest,
Where cosily my child may rest.

BRAND.

What dost thou, Agnes?

AGNES.

[*To herself.*]

Peace, I pray!

BRAND.

[*Nearer.*]

Why didst thou ope the curtain?

AGNES.

Nay,
I dreamt, and knew not what I did!

BRAND.

Snares in that dream of thine lie hid;
Close it again.

AGNES.

[*Pleading.*]

Brand!

BRAND.

Close, I say!

AGNES.

Oh, be not harsh, it is not right.

BRAND.

Close, close!

AGNES.

[*Drawing it.*]

Now all is close and tight;
Yet in my heart I scarce can deem
God injured if, at sorest need,
In the brief respite of a dream
I tasted comfort.

BRAND.

No, indeed!
He is a feeling Judge and kind,
And will indulgently forbear,
If in thy service He should find
Some idol-worship here and there.

AGNES.

[*Bursts into tears.*]

Oh, say, w h e n will He cease to crave?
My wings are weak—I faint and fall——

BRAND.

He gives to the devouring wave
Who in his giving gives not a l l.

AGNES.

I h a v e given all; I have no more!

BRAND.

[*Shakes his head.*]

Yet other gifts remain behind.

AGNES.

[*Smiling.*]

Ask: I've the courage of the poor!

BRAND.

Give!

AGNES.

Take! Ah, Brand, thou'lt nothing find!

BRAND.

Thy memories and thy moans thou hast,
Thy longings and thy sinful sighs——

AGNES.

[*Despairingly.*]

I have my heart of agonies!
Tear, tear it from me!

BRAND.

Thou hast cast
Thy offerings in the yawning deep
For nothing, if thou count them losses

AGNES.

[*Shudders.*]

Narrow is thy Lord's way, and steep.

BRAND.

That way Will cannot choose but keep.

AGNES.

And Mercy's is——

BRAND.

[*Peremptorily.*]

Beset with crosses.

AGNES.

[*Gazes before her; then, trembling.*]

Now manifest and open lies,
Abysmal as the depths of space,
That mystic Word.

BRAND.

What word?

AGNES.

He dies
Who sees Jehovah face to face.

BRAND.

[*Throws his arms about her and clasps her close.*]

O look not on Him! Close thine eyes!
Hide thee, O hide thee!

AGNES.

Must I?

BRAND.

[*Lets her go.*]

No!

AGNES.

Thou sufferest, Brand.

BRAND.

Thou art so dear.

AGNES.

Thou lov'st me, but thy love I fear.
'Tis stern.

BRAND.

Too stern?

AGNES.

Ask not; whereso
Thou goest, I will also go!

BRAND.

Think'st thou without design I won thee
Out of thy gladsome gay content,
Or, half in earnest, laid upon thee
The call to self-abandonment?
Woe to us both; too dear we paid,
Too vast a sacrifice we made;
Thou art my wife: I crave thee all
To live according to our call.

AGNES.

Crave; only leave me not.

BRAND.

Indeed
I must; for rest and peace I need.
Soon shall the great new Church arise!

AGNES.

My little Church a ruin lies.

BRAND.

It was a blessed wind that blew
And thy heart's idol overthrew!
[*Clasps her as if in dread.*]
Peace be upon thee—and, through thee,
Peace also upon mine and me!
[*Goes towards the side-door.*

AGNES.

Brand, may I softly set ajar
One hateful window-barrier,—so?
Only a little? May I?

BRAND.

[*In the doorway.*]
No.
[*Goes into his room.*

AGNES.

Closed, all closed with bolt and bar!
Seals on every passion set!
Seal'd to sorrow and to sigh,
Seal'd the grave and seal'd the sky,
Seal'd to feel—and to forget!
I will out! I gasp for breath
In this lonely house of death.
Out? Oh, whither? Angry eyes
Glare upon me from the skies!

Can I, flying, high or low,
Bear my treasure where I go?
Can I from my breast unsphere
The mute vacancy of fear?—

[*Listens at* BRAND'S *door.*]

Loud he reads, he cannot hear.
There's no comfort. There's no way.
God is busy: lists to-day
But to song and praise and blessing
Of the happy, child-possessing,
Richly-gifted of the earth.
Christmas is the feast of mirth.
Me He sees not, nor takes heed
Of a lonely mother's need.—
[*Goes cautiously to the window.*]
Shall I draw the curtain back,
Till the clear and kindly ray
Chase the horror of night away
From his chamber bare and black?
Nay, he is not there at all.
Yule's the children's festival,
He hath got him leave to rise,
Haply now he stands, and cries,
Stretches little arms in vain
To his mother's darken'd pane.
Was not that a baby's voice?
Alf, I've neither will nor choice!
All is barr'd and bolted here.
'Tis thy father's bidding, dear!
Alf, I may not open now!
An obedient child art thou!
We ne'er grieved him, thou and I.
Oh, fly home then to the sky,

There is gladness, there is light,
There thy merry comrades stay
Till thou come to join their play.
Oh, but weep not in their sight,
Nor to any soul betray
That thy father bade me lock,
When thy little hand did knock.
Years bring sterner, sadder stress
Than a little child may guess.
Say, he sorrow'd, say, he sigh'd;
Say, he wove the garden's pride
All into a wreath for thee.
'Tis his doing! Canst thou see?
[*Listens, starts, and shakes her head.*]
Oh, I dream! Not bar and wall
Only from my love divide me.
When the purging fire hath tried me
In its anguish, then alone
Shall the parting barriers fall
And the mighty bolts be batter'd,
And the vaulted dungeons shatter'd,
And the prison hinges groan!
Much, oh, much is to be done
Ere we parted twain be one.
I with silent, toiling hands
Still will labour on, to fill
The abyss of his commands;
I shall nerve me, I shall will.
But it is the Feast this eve—
Last year's how unlike! And wait
We will honour it in state.
I will fetch my treasures forth.
Whereof the uncounted worth
Best a mother can conceive,

To whose spirit they express
All her life-lost happiness.

[*She kneels down by the cupboard, and takes various things out of a drawer. At the same moment,* BRAND *opens the door, and is about to speak, when he observes her occupation, checks himself and remains standing.* AGNES *does not see him.*

BRAND.

[*Softly.*]

Haunting still the mortal mound,
Playing in Death's garden-ground.

AGNES.

Lo, the robe, the veil that clad
At the font my little lad.
Under it his cloak I've laid—

[*Holds it up, gazes at it, and laughs.*]

Lord, how brave it looks and bright!
Ah, he was a bonny sight
In his festal robes array'd!
Here's the scarf, the cape he wore
When the keen wind first he bore;
Longer was it than was meet
Then, but quickly grew too spare—
I will lay it with them there.
Gloves and stockings—(Oh, what feet!)
And his hood of silken fold
That had fenced him from the cold,
All unused and clean and sweet.
Oh, and there the wrappings warm

That should shield his little form
For the journey, from the storm
When again I laid them by,
Weary unto death was I!

BRAND.

[*Clasps his hands in anguish.*]

Mercy, God! I strive in vain!
Shatter her last idol-shrine
By some other hand than mine!

AGNES.

Did I weep? Behold, a stain!
Oh, my treasure! Jewell'd prize,
Bath'd in floods from aching eyes,
Lit with fires of tortured Will,
Holy Crowning-vesture, worn
By a child to Death's font borne,
Oh, what riches have I still!

A sharp knock at the outer door; AGNES *turns with a cry, and at the same moment sees* BRAND. *The door is burst open, and a* WOMAN, *raggedly dressed, enters hastily, with a child in her arms.*

THE WOMAN.

[*Looking at the child's clothes, calls to* AGNES.]

Thou rich mother, share with me!

AGNES.

Thou art richer far!

THE WOMAN.

I see,
Thou art of the common breed,
Cramm'd with words, and void of deed.

BRAND.

[*Approaching her.*]

Tell me what thou seekest.

THE WOMAN.

Thee,
Troth, I do not seek, at least!
Rather to the wind and rain
Will I hurry out again.
Than be sermon'd by a priest;
Rather to the wild sea fly,
Drown and rot beneath the sky,
Than I'll hear the black man tell
How I'm on my way to hell;
Can I help—the devil take me—
Being what God chose to make me?

BRAND.

[*To himself.*]

Voice and feature pierce me still
With a dim and icy dread.

AGNES.

Thou shalt warm thee, if thou'rt chill;
And thy hungry child be fed.

THE WOMAN.

Where there's warmth and where there's light,
Brats of gipsies may not stay;
We must haunt the lone highway,
Hill and forest, heath and height;
We must wander, we must roam,
Leave to others house and home.
I must swiftly from this place.
Dogs of justice are behind me,
Mayor, bailiff, all in chase,
Hungering to catch and bind me!

BRAND.

Here thou shalt have shelter.

THE WOMAN.

Here!
Roof'd above and wall'd about?
No! The winter night is clear,
And the breezes blithe without.
But a rag to wrap the child!
That were something! Sooth, its wild
Rascal brother fled, and bore
With him all the clouts it wore.
Look, it lies half naked—blue,
Stiff and stark and frozen through,
By the storm-wind's icy breath.

BRAND.

Woman, on the road to death,
Free thy infant from thy doom;
Free him from thy grief and gloom;
Of his birth I'll blot the brand.

THE WOMAN.

Much, sooth, t h o u dost understand!
Such a wonder none on earth
Can, nor shall do, though he can!
War on you that set the ban,—
Wot ye where it was, that birth?
In a ditch-side, on the ground,
Gamblers drank and shouted round—
Christen'd in the sleety slime,
Cross'd with charcoal-ashes grime,
Suckled with a spirit-flask;—
When his mother bore him first
There were some stood by and cursed,
Who could they be, do you ask?
Bless you! Why, the baby's father,
Or,—the baby's fathers rather!

BRAND.

Agnes?

AGNES.

Yes.

BRAND.

Thy duty's clear.

AGNES.

[*Shuddering.*]

Never! never! Brand, to her!

THE WOMAN

Give me, give me! Give me all!
Silk and broider'd jacket small!

Nought's too good, and nought too bad,
If 'twill warm my starving lad.
He'll be going by-and-by.
Thaw his body ere he die!

BRAND.

[*To* AGNES.]

Choice is calling! Hear'st thou now?

THE WOMAN.

Store enough of clothes hast thou
For thy dead child: hast thou none
For my death-doom'd living one?

BRAND.

Is not this a warning cry
Importuning bodefully?

THE WOMAN.

Give!

AGNES.

'Tis sacrilege blood-red.
Desecration of the dead!

BRAND.

Vainly given to death he was
If thou at the threshold pause.

AGNES.

[*Crushed.*]

I obey. My heart's quick root
I will trample under foot.

Woman, come thou and receive,
I will share it with thee.

THE WOMAN.

Give!

BRAND.

S h a r e it, say'st thou?—Agnes; s h a r e it?

AGNES.

[*Wildly.*]

I will rather die than spare it
All! See, inch by inch I've bent
To thy will; my force is spent!
Half's enough; she needs no more!

BRAND.

Was the whole too much before,
When for t h y child it was meant?

AGNES.

[*Gives.*]

Woman, take; in this was clad
At the font my little lad.
Here the scarf, cloak, mantle, good
For the night-air, here the hood
Warm for winter; take this last——

THE WOMAN.

Give me!

BRAND.

Is this a l l thou hast?

AGNES.

[*Gives again.*]

Take the crowning vesture worn,
By the child to Death's Font borne!

THE WOMAN.

So! I see there's nothing more.
I'll clear out without delay,
Dress my baby at the door—
Then with all my pack away! [*Goes.*

AGNES.

[*In violent inner conflict; at length asks.*]
Is it reason, Brand, to lay
Further bidding on me?

BRAND.

Say,
Didst thou with a glad heart go
To thy task of giving?

AGNES.

No.

BRAND.

Then thy gift is vainly will'd
And His bidding unfulfill'd. [*Going.*

AGNES.

[*Remains silent until he is near the door, then calls.*]
Brand!

BRAND

What wilt thou?

AGNES.

I have lied—
See, I'm humbled, I am grieved.
Never knew'st thou nor believed,
Anything was left beside.

BRAND.

Well?

AGNES.

[*Takes a folded child's cap from her bosom.*]

See, one I thought to hide—
One!

BRAND.

The cap?

AGNES.

Yes, tear-bewet,
Clammy with his mortal sweat,
There in my beating bosom set!

BRAND.

In thy idol-bonds abide. [*Going.*

AGNES.

Hold!

BRAND.

What wilt thou?

AGNES.

Thou dost know.

[*Holds out the cap to him.*

BRAND.

[*Approaches and asks, without taking it.*]

Gladly given?

AGNES.

Gladly!

BRAND.

So.

At the door she lingers yet. [*Goes*

AGNES.

Shiver'd, shatter'd—pluck'd away—
All that bound me to the clay.

[*Stands a while motionless; by degrees her face assumes an expression of radiant gladness.* BRAND *returns; she flies joyously towards him, flings herself about his neck, and cries.*]

I am free, Brand, I am free!

BRAND.

Agnes!

AGNES.

Night is fled from me!
All the terrors that oppress'd
Like an incubus my breast,
In the gulf are sunk to rest!

Will hath conquer'd in the fray,
Cloud and mist are swept away;
Through the night, athwart the Dead,
Streaks of morning glimmer red.
Graveyard! Graveyard! By the word
Now no more a tear is stirr'd;
By the name no wound is riven,
Risen is the child to heaven!

BRAND.

Agnes! Thou hast conquered now

AGNES.

I indeed have conquer'd. Yes;
Conquer'd death and bitterness!
Oh, look up, look heavenward, thou!
See, before the throne he stands—
As in old days—radiant, glad,
To us stretching down his hands!
Though a thousand mouths I had,
Leave to ask, and to obtain,
Never one of them should pray
For his coming back again.
O how wond'rous is God's way!
By that sacrifice, so grievous,
Won from bondage is my soul;
He was given us but to leave us,
Died to lure me to the goal.
Thanks be to thee that thy hand
Stoutly strove and firmly led—
Ah, I saw thine own heart bled.
Now it is for t h e e , instead,
In the vale of choice to stand,

Now for thee to hear the call
Of the awful Nought or All.

BRAND.

Agnes, this is darkly said;—
Vanquish'd, lo, our sorrow lies!

AGNES.

Thou forget'st the word of dread:
Whoso sees Jehovah dies!

BRAND.

[*Starts back.*]

Woe upon me! What a light
Thou hast kindled! Never! No!
I have stalwart hands for fight,
And I will not let thee go!
Tear all earthly ties from me,
All possessions I will lose,
Only never, never thee!

AGNES.

At the cross-way stand'st thou: choose!
Quench the kindled light I brought,
Fence the fountain of my thought,
Give me back my idol treasures
(Still she lingers by the door),
Give me back the earthly pleasures
Of the bright, blind days of yore;
Thrust me back into the pit
Where till now I lulled my sin,
Deeper, deeper thrust me in—

Thou canst lightly compass it;
Clip my wings and check my flight,
Load my feet, and drag me bound
Down, down from thy dizzy height
To my lowly native ground;
Let me lead the life I led
When the darkness yet was dread;
If thou darest thus to lose,
Then, as ever, I am thine;
At the cross-way stand'st thou: choose!

BRAND.

Woe, if such a choice were mine.
Ah, but in some place afar,
Where no bitter memories are,
Death and darkness thou shalt brave!

AGNES.

Hast thou h e r e thy work forgotten,
Holy work—and holy grave?
And the thousands sin-besotten,
It is h e r e thy task to save—
Those thou guidest for God's sake
To the Fountain that renews?
At the cross-way stand'st thou: choose!

BRAND.

Then I have no choice to make.

AGNES.

[*Throws herself on his neck.*]

Thanks for that, and thanks for all!
Thou the weary one hast led;

Over me the dank mists fall,
Thou wilt watch beside my bed.

BRAND.

Sleep! thy day's work now is done.

AGNES.

Done, and now the lamp alight.
I have fought out all my might,
I am weary of the sun.
Oh, but praising God is best!
Brand, good-night!

BRAND.

Good-night!

AGNES.

Good-night!
Thanks for all. Now I will rest.

[*Goes.*

BRAND.

[*Clenches his hands against his breast.*]

Soul, be patient in thy pain!
Triumph in its bitter cost.
All to lose was all to gain;
Nought abideth but the Lost!

ACT FIFTH

A year and a half later. The new Church stands complete, and adorned for consecration. The river runs close beside it. A misty morning, early.

The Sexton *is busy hanging garlands outside the Church; shortly after comes the* Schoolmaster.

The Schoolmaster.

At work already?

The Sexton.

None too soon.
Lend me a hand; I must festoon
The path, to keep the march in trim.

The Schoolmaster.

Before the Manse I see ascending
Something that rears a rounded rim—

The Sexton.

Ay, surely, surely!

The Schoolmaster.

What is pending?

THE SEXTON.

Why, it is what they call a shield
With Parson's name in a gold field.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

To-day the valley's in high feather.
From far and wide they're flocking hither,
The fjord with sails is all agleam.

THE SEXTON.

Yes; they've awaken'd from their dream.
In the late Pastor's day, no breast
With bitterness and strife was cumber'd,
Each slumber'd as his neighbour slumber'd,
—I'm not quite certain which is best.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Life, Sexton, life!

THE SEXTON.

Yet you and I
Pass this "life" unregarding by;
How comes it?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Why, before, the folk
Slumber'd, and nowise toil'd, as we did;
We fell asleep when they awoke,
Because we were no longer needed.

THE SEXTON.

But yet you said that life was best?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

By Dean and deacon that's profess'd.
And I too say so, like the rest,—
Provided, mind, the "life" in view
Is that of the great Residue.
But we two serve another law
Than that which holds the mass in awe;
Set by the State to guard and guide,—
Look, we must stand against the tide,
Cherish the Church and Education,
And keep aloof from agitation.
Briefly, in nothing take a side.

THE SEXTON.

But Parson's in it, heart and soul.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

And just in that forgets his rôle.
His own superiors, well I know,
Look with displeasure on his action,
And, dared they but offend his faction,
Had thrown him over long ago.
But he is fine; he smells a rat;
He's got a recipe for that.
He builds the Church. Here you may glue
All eyes up, if you will but d o .
W h a t ' s done none has a thought to spare for;
The d o i n g of it's all they care for.
So they who follow, and we who lead,
All equally are men of deed.

THE SEXTON.

Well, you have sat in the great Thing,
And ought to know the Land and Folk;

But one who travell'd through the glen
A little after we awoke
Said, we'd been sleeping folks till then,
But, having waked,—were p r o m i s i n g.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Yes; we're a promising folk, of course,—
And mighty promises we're giving,—
So fast we stride, we'll soon be living
Elucidations of their force.

THE SEXTON.

One thing I've ponder'd many a day;
You've studied,—what do folks intend
By that same "People's Promise," pray?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

A People's Promise, my good friend?
That were a long investigation;
But 'tis a thing that is pursued
By force of sheer anticipation;
A grand Idea they must make good
In f u t u r e, be it understood.

THE SEXTON.

Thanks; I see that at any rate;
But there's another point I'd fain
Beg of you briefly to explain.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Speak freely.

THE SEXTON.

Tell me, at what date
Comes, what is call'd the future?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Why,
It never does come!

THE SEXTON.

Never?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

No,
And only follows Nature so.
For when it comes, you see, 'tis grown
The Present, and the Future's flown.

THE SEXTON.

Why, yes, to that there's no reply;
That logic one must needs accept.
But—when then is the promise kept?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

A Promise is a future-dated
Pact, as I have already stated;
'Tis kept in Future.

THE SEXTON.

That is clear.
When will the Future, though, be here!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Aside.*]

You blessed Sexton!

[*Aloud.*]

Worthy friend,
Must I the argument recall?
The Future cannot come at all,
Because its coming is its end.

THE SEXTON.

Thank you.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

In all conceptions lies
Something that looks like artifice,
But yet is quite direct and plain,—
That is to say, for any brain
Able to reckon up to ten.
To m a k e a promise means, at last,
To b r e a k it,—spite of best intent;
Truth to one's word has always pass'd
For hard; but you may just as well
Prove it purely impossible,—
If you've an eye for argument.—
There, let this Promise-question be!
Come tell me——!

THE SEXTON.

Hist!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

What is it?

THE SEXTON.

Hark!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

I hear the organ play!

THE SEXTON.

'Tis he.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

The Pastor?

THE SEXTON.

Even so.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Save the mark
But he is out betimes!

THE SEXTON.

I guess
He stirr'd no pillow yesternight.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

What do you say?

THE SEXTON.

All is not right.
He's felt the pang of loneliness
Since first his widowhood began.
He hides his sorrow all he can;

But, whiles, it may not be controll'd;
His heart's a jar that will not hold,
And overflows by base and brim;—
So then he plays. 'Tis like a wild
Weeping for buried wife and child.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

It is as if they talk'd with him——

THE SEXTON.

As if o n e suffer'd, o n e consoled——

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

H'm—if one dared to be affected!

THE SEXTON.

Ah,—if one did not serve the State!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Ah,—if one bore no leaden weight
Of forms that have to be respected!

THE SEXTON.

Ah,—if one dared toss tape and seal
And ledger to the deuce for ever!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

And leave off striving to be clever;
And, Sexton, if one dared to f e e l !

THE SEXTON.

No one is near,—let's feel, my friend!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

We cannot fitly condescend
To smirch ourselves in human slime.
Let no man, says the Parson, dare
To be two things at the same time;
And, with the best will, no one can
Be an official and a man;
Our part in all things is, to swear
By our great exemplar—the Mayor.

THE SEXTON.

Why just by him?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Do you recall
The fire that wreck'd his house, and yet
The deeds were rescued, one and all?

THE SEXTON.

It was an evening——

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Wild and wet,
And like ten toiling men toiled he;
But indoors stood the Devil in glee
Guffawing, and his wife shriek'd out:
"O save your soul, sweet husband! See,
Satan will have you!" Then a shout
Rang backward through the surging vapours:
"My soul may go to hell for me;
Just lend a hand to save the papers!"

Look, that's a Mayor—without, within!
From top to toe, from core to skin;
He'll win his way, I'm certain, yonder,
Where his life's toil shall have its price.

THE SEXTON.

And where may that be?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Where, I wonder,
But in the good Mayors' Paradise.

THE SEXTON.

My learned friend!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

What now?

THE SEXTON.

A token
Of our fermenting age I hear,
Methinks, in every word you've spoken;
For that it d o e s ferment is clear.
Witness the reverence all refuse
To old-established Wont and Use.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

What moulders, in the mould's its doom,
What rots must nourish what is fresh;
Their vitals canker and consume,
Let them cough up the imposthume,
Or to the grave with their dead flesh!
There's ferment, yes; past fear or hope,

That's plain without a telescope.
The day our ancient Church lay low,
Everything with it seem'd to go
Wherein our life struck root and found
Its home-soil and its native-ground.

THE SEXTON.

Then on the throng a stillness came.
"Down with it! Down with it!" they cried
At first; but soon that clamour died,
And many felt their ears a-flame,
And stole shy glances of distrust,
When the ancestral House of Prayer
Was to be levell'd—then and there,—
By hands unhallow'd, in the dust.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

But countless bonds, they fancied, knit
Them ever to the ghost of it,
So long as yonder Palace lack'd
The final seal of consecration;
And so in anguish'd expectation
They watch'd it growing into fact,
And blinked before the glorious End,
When the old tatter should descend
And the new colours flaunt the gale.
But ever as the spire upclomb
They grew more silent and more pale,
And now,—well, now the End is come.

THE SEXTON.

Look at the throng. Both young and old
Swarm hither.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

And by thousands told.—
How still they are!

THE SEXTON.

And yet they moan,
Like sea fore-feeling tempest's fret.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

It is the People's hearts that groan,
As if, with piercing doubts beset,
The great new age they did forebode,
Or were in solemn sessions met
To nominate another God.
Where, where's the priest,—I stifle here.
Would heaven that I could disappear!

THE SEXTON.

I too, I too!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

In hours like this
No man well knows how deep he is.
Each depth a deeper depth revealing,
We will, then will not, and then doubt——

THE SEXTON.

My friend!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

My friend!

THE SEXTON.

H'm!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Speak it out!

THE SEXTON.

I think, in very truth, we're feeling!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Feeling? Not I!

THE SEXTON.

Nor I, take warning!
A single witness I defy!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

We're men, not school-girls, you and I.
My youngsters wait for me. Good-morning.
[*Goes.*

THE SEXTON.

Just now I'd visions like a fool:
Now I'm again collected, cool,
And close as clasps! To work I'll press!
Here's no more scope for hand or tool,
And Satan's couch is idleness.
[*Goes out at the other side.*

The organ, which during what precedes has been heard in an undertone, suddenly peals forth, and ends with a discordant shriek. Shortly afterwards BRAND *comes out.*

BRAND.

No, I vainly, vainly seek
To unlock the heart of sound;

All the song becomes a shriek.
Walls and arches, vault and ground,
Seem to stoop and crowd and throng,
Seem to clasp with iron force,
Seem to close around the song,
As the coffin round the corse!
Vain my effort, vain my suit,
All the organ's music's mute,
Fain a prayer I would have spoken,
But my lifted voice fell broken,—
Like the muffled moan it fell
Of a riven and rusted bell.
'Twas as if the Lord were seated
In the chancel, and beheld,
And in wrath, while I entreated,
All my piteous prayer repell'd!—
  Great shall be the House of God;
In my confidence I swore it;
Fearless, smote and wreck'd and tore it,
Swept it level with the sod.
Now the finish'd work stands fast.
As the people throng before it,
Still they cry: "How vast! how vast!"
Is it they see true or I,
Who no vastness can descry?
Is it great? The thing I will'd,
Is it in t h i s House fulfill'd?
Can the rushing fire of passion
That begot it, h e r e be still'd?
Was the Temple of this fashion
That I dream'd should overspan
All the misery of Man?
  Ah, had Agnes stay'd with me,
Not thus vainly had I striven!

Small things greatly she could see,
From doubt's anguish set me free,
Clasp together Earth and Heaven
Like the green roof of the tree.

[*He observes the preparations for the festival.*]

All with wreaths and banners hung;
Children practising their song;
So the Manse they surge and throng,—
Festal greetings they would bring me;—
Yonder gleams my name in gold!—
Give me light, O God, or fling me
Fathom-deep beneath this mould!
In an hour begins the Feast.
Every thought and every tongue
Will be ringing with "the priest,"
All their thoughts I can discern;
All their words I feel them burn;
All their praise, on elf-wings sped,
Rives me like an icy blast!
Oh, to be enfolded fast
In oblivion, hide my head
In a wild beast's hole at last!

THE MAYOR.

[*Enters in full uniform, radiant with satisfaction, and greets him.*]

Here is the great day come at last,
The Sabbath to the toiling six;
Now we can strike our sail, and fix
Our Sunday pennon to the mast,
Glide softly with the gliding flood
And find that all is very good.
Bravo!—great, noble man, whose fame

Will soon be far and wide related.
Bravo!—I'm moved, yet all the same
Most inexpressibly elated!
But you appear——?

BRAND.

I'm suffocated.

THE MAYOR.

Pooh, a mere momentary whim!
Preach you now, till it roars again!—
Fill the folks' bushel to the brim.
Not one his wonder can contain,
The resonance is so full and plain.

BRAND.

Indeed?

THE MAYOR.

The Dean himself is warm
In admiration and delight.
And then, what elegance of form,
And what a grandeur, what a height
In every part——

BRAND.

You've noted this?

THE MAYOR.

What noted?

BRAND.

It seems great to you?

THE MAYOR.

Why, it not only s e e m s, but i s,
No matter what the point of view.

BRAND.

It is great? Really? That is true—?

THE MAYOR.

Great?—yes, God bless me,—and to spare—
For folks so far to North. Elsewhere
They've higher standards, I'm aware?
But among us who captive dwell
Amid drear wastes and barren mounds,
On the scant verge of fjord and fell,
Its greatness 'mazes and confounds.

BRAND.

Yes, that is so, and all we do
Is,—change an old lie for a new.

THE MAYOR.

What?

BRAND.

We have lured their hearts away
From the time-honour'd gloom and mould
To soaring spire and open day.
"How venerable!" they cried of old.
"Now vast!" in chorus now they roar—
"The like was never seen before!"

THE MAYOR.

My worthy friend, I needs must hold
His breeding scarcely *quantum suff.*
For whom it is not great enough.

BRAND.

But clear it shall be unto all
That, as it stands, the Church is small.
To keep that hidden were to lie.

THE MAYOR.

Nay, listen,—let such whimsies fly!
What can it profit to dispraise
What you yourself have toil'd to raise?
You've satisfied their utmost dream;
It seems to them more rich and rare
Than aught they e'er saw anywhere:—
Let it continue so to seem!
Why should we vex their silly sight
With proffers of the flaming link,
When they're indifferent to light?
The question's only what they t h i n k.
It does not signify a jot
Though the Church were a pigeon-cot,
If in the faith they're rooted fast,
That it is infinitely vast.

BRAND.

In every matter the same thought.

THE MAYOR.

To-day, moreover, we hold fête:
The whole assembly is our guest;
It is a point of etiquette
That everything should look its best;
And for your own sake, most of all,

It were judicious to keep clear
Of that sore fact—that it is small.

BRAND.

How so?

THE MAYOR.

Well, listen, you shall hear.
Firstly, the headmen of the town
Are giving you a piece of plate,
Whose graved inscription is frustrate
If the work's size is whittled down;
And then the Ode, composed express,
And my inaugural address,—
You leave them helpless in the lurch,
Docking the greatness of the Church.
You see then, you must yield your doubt,
And boldly face the matter out.

BRAND.

I see, what oft has stung my eye,
A lying triumph crown the lie.

THE MAYOR.

But, in God's name, my worthy friend,
Where do these strong expressions tend?
However, waiving points of taste,
Hear now my second reason,—gold,
As that was silver; for, behold,
You, like a chosen son, are graced
With favour in the royal sight;
In short,—you have been named a Knight!
This very day you'll walk elate,
Cross upon breast, a titled man.

BRAND.

Another, heavier cross's weight
I bear; take t h a t from me who can.

THE MAYOR.

What's this? You do not seem to shake
With agitation at such prize?
You mystery of mysteries!
But pray consider, for God's sake——

BRAND.

[*Stamping.*]

This is mere babble of vain speech:—
Nothing I learn and nothing teach;
You have not grasp'd the smallest shred
Of the true sense of what I said.
I meant not greatness men compute,
And measure by the inch and foot,
But that which, viewless, darts and streams,
Pierces the soul with frosts and fires,
That beckons to impassion'd dreams,
And like the starlit heaven inspires—
That—leave me! I am worn, oppress'd;—
Convince, teach, edify the rest.
[*Goes up towards the Church.*

THE MAYOR.

[*To himself.*]

In such a labyrinth who can stray
And find an issue? Greatness lay

In something that is "viewless," "streams,"
"Not inchwise measured," "lifts to dreams,"
And "starlit heaven?" It went so, surely?
Has he been lunching prematurely? [*Goes.*

BRAND.

[*Comes down over the open ground.*]

So desolate on the upland drear
I never stood as I stand here;
My impotent questionings evoke
Echoes that cackle and that croak.

[*Looks towards the* MAYOR.]

For him, I would my heel might bruise
His head! Each time I make emprise
To loose him from the bond of lies,
With shameless wantonness he spews
His rotten soul before my eyes!—
O Agnes, why wast thou so frail?
Would that this hollow game were done,
Where none give in, and none prevail;—
Yes, hopeless he that fights alone!

THE DEAN.

[*Coming up.*]

O, my beloved! O, my sheep—!
Nay, I beg pardon,—would have said
My reverend brother!—cannot keep
My predication from my head;
I got it yesterday by rote,
The taste still lingers in my throat.
Enough of that.—To you I offer

My thanks, whose energy began,
Whose firmness carried through, the plan,
Despite the babbler and the scoffer;
Fell'd that which was about to fall,
And worthily restored it all!

BRAND.

Far from that yet.

THE DEAN.

How say you, friend?
Is Consecration not the end?

BRAND.

A House new-builded asks, as well,
A cleansed Soul, therein to dwell.

THE DEAN.

All that will come without our stir.
So gay, so elegant a roof
Will be an adequate reproof
To every unwash'd worshipper.
And that delightful sounding-board,
That doubles every pious word,
Will render without fail our flocks
Fivescore per cent. more orthodox.
Results so notable as these
The first-rate Nationalities
Themselves, 'tis said, can hardly better.—
For this your Country is your debtor,
Yours only; let me then express
These heartfelt, brotherly thanks of mine,

To be re-echoed, as I guess,
In winged words across the wine,
By many a fiery young divine,
When at the festal board we crown
This the great day of your renown.—
But, my dear Brand, you look so faint—?

BRAND.

My heart and hope have long been spent.

THE DEAN.

No wonder;—with so grave a care,
And all unaided and unfriended.
But now the worst of it is ended,
And all gives promise of a splendid
Day for our function. Don't despair!
All will go well! Reflect! A throng
Has gather'd, many thousand strong,
From far-off parishes,—and who
Can vie in eloquence with you?
See where your reverend brethren stand,
To welcome you with heart and hand;
While all these lowly bosoms beat
With ardour for you, first to last!
And then, the work, so ably plann'd,
The decoration, so complete,—
The general theme—How great! How vast!
—And the unparallel'd repast!
Into the kitchen I was looking
Just now, and saw the calf a-cooking.
Nay, Brand, a pretty beast, I vow!
You must have had some trouble, now,
In these hard times, before you found

So fine a bit of flesh to cater,
With meat at half a crown a pound!
But that can be deferr'd till later.
I'm on another errand bound.

BRAND.

Speak freely; slash, stab, rive and rend!

THE DEAN.

I have a milder way, my friend.
But briefly: for our duties press.
One little matter, I confess,
I'd have you from to-day set right;
A task that cannot but be light.
Nay, I imagine you can guess
Half what I'm hinting at, at least?
I mean, your duties as a priest.
Hitherto you have been a loose
Observer still, of Wont and Use;
But Use and Wont, if not the best
Of things, are yet the needfulest.
Well, well, I will not be severe;
You're young, and but a novice here,
Town-bred, and scarcely understand
What country usages demand.
But n o w, n o w it is urgent, friend,
The lack of judgment to amend.
You hitherto have too much heeded
What this man and what that man needed,
That error (in your private ear)
Is grievous. Weigh them in the block;
Use the same comb for all the flock;
You won't repent it, never fear.

BRAND.

Be more explicit.

THE DEAN.

The thing's clear.
You for the Parish's behoof
Have built a Church. That is the woof
That robes the spirit of Law and Peace;
For to the State, religion is
The power that lifts and purifies,
The stronghold where its safety lies,
The universal moral measure.
You see, the State is scant of treasure,
And wants full value for its pence.
"Good Christians" means "good citizens."
Do you suppose it pays its pelf
To be for God and Man a tool,
And bring annoyance on itself?
No, faith, the State is not a fool;
And all our course would run amiss,
Did not the State, by strictest rule,
Look only to the life that is.
But the State's object, my good friend.
Through its officials must be gain'd,
In this case through its priests——

BRAND.

Each word
Is wisdom! Speak!

THE DEAN.

I'm near the end.
This Church, you see, you have conferr'd
Upon the State, for its sole profit;

And, therefore, all the uses of it
Must to the State's advantage tend.
This is the meaning, note it well,
Of our forthcoming celebration,
This shall be meant by chiming bell,
And this by Gift-deed's recitation.
A promise thus the Gift implies,
Whose force I'd have you scrutinise——

BRAND.

By God, I never meant it so!

THE DEAN.

Yes; but it's now too late, you know——

BRAND.

Too late? Too late! That will be seen!

THE DEAN.

Be sensible! I can't keep grave!
What is the tragedy therein?
You are not ask'd to promise sin?
Souls do not grow more hard to save
Because the Country profits too;
With due discretion and despatch
Two masters' bidding you may do;
You were not made a priest, to snatch
Peter's or Harry's single soul
Out of the torments of the lake;
But that the Parish as a whole
Might of the shower of grace partake;
And, the whole Parish saved, it's clear,
You save every Parishioner.

The State is (what you hardly dream)
Exactly h a l f republican:
Liberty held in strictest ban,
Equality in high esteem.
Yet is Equality never won
But by destroying More and Less,—
And it is t h a t you have not done!
Nay, you have striven to express
And emphasise unlikenesses
That slumber'd hitherto unknown.
Men, mere Church-members till of late,
To Personalities are grown.
That does no service to the State;
And thus it is, each Parish rate
Each offering to the common good,
Is from unwilling niggards bled;
The Church no longer is the hood
That fits alike on every head.

BRAND.

O, vistas infinite unfold!

THE DEAN.

Don't be cast down; no gain in that;
Though I must own I shudder at
The dire confusion I behold.
But while there's life, there's hope, and you
Are by this gift baptized anew
To obligations yet more great
Of serving, by your Church, the State.
Men need a rule in all they do;
Or reckless forces, breaking loose,
Like colts undaunted by the curb,

Spurn gates and fences, and disturb
The thousand landmarks of old Use.
Each order'd mode of life proclaims
One Law, that goes by many names.
The Artist calls it S c h o o l, and I'm
Mistaken if I have not heard
Our soldiers call it k e e p i n g t i m e.
Ah yes, friend, that's the very word!
That's what the State desires at last!
Double-quick time gets on too fast,
And goose-step lags too far behind;
All men to step alike, and beat
The selfsame music with their feet,
That is the method to its mind!

BRAND.

Kennel the eagle;—and let loose
On empyrean flights the goose!

THE DEAN.

We, thank the Lord, are not as these;—
But if we must use allegory,
We'll turn to Scripture, if you please.
For every case it has a story,
From Genesis to Revelation
It swarms with stimulating Fable;
I will but hint, in illustration,
At that projected Tower of Babel,
How did the good folks prosper, pray?
And why? The answer's clear as day;
Their ranks divided, sort by sort,
Each one his private language spoke,
They drew not in the common yoke,
Grew "Personalities," in short.

That's half the twofold core that lies
Embedded in this shell of fable;—
That all strength, sever'd, is unstable,
And death-doom'd who the world defies.
When God desires a man to fall
He makes him an Original;
The Romans had it, 'faith, that God
Made the man mad; but mad is odd,
And oddness singleness, you know;
Therefore who fights without a friend
Must look to suffer in the end
The fate that overtook the man
Whom David posted in the van.

BRAND.

Yes, very likely: but what though?
In Death I see not Overthrow.
And is your faith quite firm and fast
That had those builders spoken still
One speech, and acted with one will,
They would have piled the pinnacle
Of Babel up to heaven at last?

THE DEAN.

To heaven? No, that is where it lies:
No man gets quite to Paradise.
There, see, we have the second core,
Embedded in this shell of fable;—
That every building is unstable
Which to the starry heaven would soar!

BRAND.

Yet, Jacob's ladder reach'd that goal.
Thither by longing soars the Soul.

THE DEAN.

In t h a t way! Why, God bless me, yes
Further discussion's needless there.
Heaven is the wage of faithfulness,
Of course, and moral life, and prayer.
But life and faith hold such dissent,
They only thrive, when kept apart;
Six days for toiling hands are meant,
The seventh, for stirring of the heart;
If all the week we preach'd and pray'd,
The Sabbath had in vain been made.
God's incense, rightly to be used,
Must not be lavishly diffused;
Worship, like Art, was not created
To be in perfume dissipated.
The Ideal you may safely sound
From pulpit's holy vantage-ground;
But with your surplice lay it by,
When you emerge beneath the sky.
All things, as I have said, are based
On laws that strictly must be traced,
And my sole end in speaking is
To give this fact due emphasis.

BRAND.

One thing I very clearly see:
No State Soul-case is fit for me.

THE MAYOR.

A perfect fit, I will engage,
My friend,—but on a loftier stage:—
You must go up——

BRAND.

Is that an end
I reach by plunging in the mire?

THE DEAN.

Whoso him humbleth shall go higher!
Hooks will not catch, unless they bend.

BRAND.

Man can't be used, unless he perish!

THE DEAN.

Good God! How can you think I cherish
Any such purpose?

BRAND.

Ay, indeed,
That's the condition! First to bleed!
Your bloodless spirit to put on
Man must be first a skeleton!

THE DEAN.

I would not put the lancet through
A very kitten—far less you;
But yet I thought no harm were done
In leaving just ajar the door
That opens, where I went before.

BRAND.

And do you know what you have sought?
This, that upon the State's cock-cry

I that Ideal should deny
For which I until now have fought?

THE DEAN.

Deny, friend? Who makes such request?
Duty is all I bid you follow:
I ask you quietly to swallow
That which your people can't digest.
Keep it intact, if you're disposed,—
But yet hermetically closed;
At home, in God's name, soar and swell,
Not as a public spectacle;
Trust me, the will that won't be bent
Brings its unfailing punishment.

BRAND.

Ay, fear of torment, hope of gain,
Are on thy brow the brand of Cain,
Which cries that thou by worldly art
Hast slain the Abel in thy heart!

THE DEAN.

[*To himself.*]

Upon my word he calls me "Thou";
That is too much!—

[*Aloud.*]

I will not now
Prolong our strife, but, to conclude,
Would have it clearly understood,
That if you'd prosper, you must weigh
What land you live in, and what day.
For no man wins the fight with fortune,

But in alliance with his time.
Which of the men who paint and rhyme
Dare fail when social claims importune?
Look at our soldiers! Why, the gleam
Of sabres is become a dream!
And wherefore? Since a law commands:
Postpone thy own need to the Land's!
Let each his own excrescence pare,
Neither uplift him, nor protrude,
But vanish in the multitude.
"Humane the age is," says the Mayor:
And if humanely it be met
Will bring you fame and fortune yet.
But all your angles must be rounded,
Your gnarls and bosses scraped and pounded;
You must grow sleek as others do,
All singularities eschew,
If you would labour without let.

BRAND.

Away! away!

THE DEAN.

I quite agree.
Men of your stamp must finally
Be summon'd to a higher seat;
But, in the greater as the less,
Only the regimental dress
Will make your happiness complete.
The corporal, staff in hand, must knock
The sense of Time into his flock;
For, to our mind, the best of all
Commanders is the corporal.
Just as the corporal leads his men

Into the church, battalion-wise,
So must the priest lead his, again,
By parishes to Paradise.
It's all so easy!—Faith, you say,
Broad-based upon authority;
Which, being upon learning stay'd,
May be implicitly obey'd:
While rules and ritual leave no doubt
How faith ought to be acted out.
Wherefore, my brother,—pluck up cheer!
Employ the time for meditation;
Reflect upon your situation,
And don't give way to futile fear!
I'll see just now if I can pitch
My music to a higher note;
Though with an unaccustom'd throat,
A sounding-board's so seldom here.
Farewell, farewell! I mean to preach
Of human nature's sinful prime,
God's image nigh obliterated.—
But now I'm thinking it is time
The inner mortal should be baited. [*Goes.*

BRAND.

[*Stands for a moment as if petrified in thought.*]

All I have offer'd for my call,
God's as I vainly held it,—all;
And now one trumpet-blast reveal'd
Before what idols I had kneel'd.
Not yet! not yet! I'm not their slave!
Yon churchyard has had blood to sup,
Light, life I've laid in yonder grave·—
My soul shall not be yielded up!

O horrible to stand alone,—
Amid a glimmering world of dead;
Horrible to receive a stone,
Howe'er I hunger after bread.—
How true, how deadly true, his strain,—
But yet how vacant and how vain.
Dim broods God's dove of piercing eyes;
Alas, to me she never flies.—
O, had I but one faithful breast—
To give me strength, to give me rest.

EINAR, *pale, emaciated, dressed in black, comes along the road and stops on perceiving* BRAND.

BRAND.

[*Cries out.*]

You, Einar?

EINAR.

By that name I'm known.

BRAND.

I was just thirsting for a breast
That was not made of wood or stone!
Come, to my heart of hearts be press'd!

EINAR.

My haven's found, I am at rest.

BRAND.

You bear a grudge for the event
Of our last meeting——

EINAR.

In no wise;
I blame you not. You were but sent
To be the passive instrument
Wherewith God oped my erring eyes.

BRAND.

[*Starts back.*]

What tongue is this?

EINAR.

The tongue of peace—
The tongue they learn, who, timely torn
From Sleep of Sin, awake new-born.

BRAND.

Marvellous! I had heard of this,—
That you in quite another way
Were walking——

EINAR.

I was led astray
By pride, in my own strength secure.
The idols the world holds divine,
The talent I was told was mine,
My singer's voice, were all malign
Seductions unto Satan's lure.
But God (I praise Him) for me wrought,
Left not His erring sheep unsought,
He help'd me in my hour of need.

BRAND.

Help'd you—in what way?

EINAR.

Yes, indeed:—
I fell.

BRAND.

Fell? How?

EINAR.

To dissipation.
With gambling tastes He me imbued—

BRAND.

And t h a t was God's solicitude?

EINAR.

'Twas the first step to my salvation.
On that my health He undermined,
The talent from my fingers fled,
My love of revelry declined,
Then, to the hospital consign'd,
Long I lay sick, and round my bed
Flames seem'd to glare, and on each wall
Myriads of giant flies to crawl;—
Came out, and soon acquaintance made
With certain sisters, three in all,
Soldiers in God's cause arm'd and paid.
And they, together with a priest,
Me from the yoke of Earth released;
Pluck'd me from Sin that held me fast,
And made me the Lord's child at last.

BRAND.

Indeed?

EINAR.

Divergent paths we follow;
One seeks the height, and one the hollow.

BRAND.

But after?

EINAR.

True; I turn'd me thence,
To preach for Total Abstinence;
But since that Work for the unwary
Is strewn with perilous temptation,
I chose another occupation,
And travel now as Missionary——

BRAND.

Where?

EINAR.

To the Caudate-nigger State
But now, I think, we'll separate;
My time is precious——

BRAND.

Won't you stay?
You see here's festival to-day.

EINAR.

Thanks, no; the swarthy Heathens wait.—
Farewell. [*Going.*

BRAND.

And does no memory stir,
Bidding you ask—?

EINAR.

Of what?

BRAND.

Of her
Who would have grieved at the abyss,
That parts another day from this.

EINAR.

I guess your meaning; you refer
To that young female, whose allure
Held me in pleasure's net secure,
Till Faith's ablution made me pure.
—Yes, and how is it then with her?

BRAND.

Next year I won her for my wife.

EINAR.

That unimportant, I prefer
To leave these trivial facts unknown.
What's w e i g h t y I desire alone.

BRAND.

God richly bless'd our common life
With joy and sorrow: The child pined——

EINAR.

That's unimportant——

BRAND.

So it is;
He was but given to be resign'd;

Our eyes one day shall look on his.
But afterwards she also died;
Their graves bloom yonder side by side.

EINAR.

That's unimportant——

BRAND.

That likewise?

EINAR.

Such things are trifles in my eyes,
How did she die, I want to know?

BRAND.

With Hope that yet a Dawn shall glow,
With all her heart's rich treasure whole.
With Will that never lost control,
With thanks for all that life had lent
And life had taken away, she went.

EINAR.

Trumpery figments every one.
Say what the faith she died in was.

BRAND.

Unshaken.

EINAR.

In what?

BRAND.

In God.

EINAR.

Alas!
Only in Him? She is undone.

BRAND.

What say you?

EINAR.

Damn'd, to my regret.

BRAND.

[*Quietly.*]

Go, scoundrel!

EINAR.

Y o u shall feel as well
The clutches of the Lord of hell;—
For both, eternal torments wait.

BRAND.

You, wretch, dare sentence to the Fire!
Yourself late wallow'd in the mire——

EINAR.

On me no spot is to be seen;
The tub of Faith hath wash'd me clean;
Each splash has vanish'd, scraped and scored
On Holiness's washing-board;
In Vigilance's mangle I
Have wrung my Adam's-vesture dry;
And shine like snowy surplice fair,
Soap-lather'd with the suds of Prayer!

BRAND.

Hold!

EINAR.

Hold, yourself! Here's sulphur fume,
I see the glints of Satan's horn!
I am Salvation's good wheat-corn,
And you the shovell'd chaff of Doom. [*Goes.*

BRAND.

[*Looks a while after him; all at once his eyes flash and he breaks out.*]

T h a t , that is the man I need!
Now all bonds are burst that bound me
Now my flag shall wave around me
Though none follow where I lead!

THE MAYOR.

[*Comes hastily in.*]

Pray, dear Pastor, hasten, do!
The procession-people stand
Waiting only the command—

BRAND.

Let them come then!

THE MAYOR.

Wanting you!
Pray reflect, and hasten in!
All impatient to begin,
See, the whole mass throng and strain;
Like a torrent after storm
On the Manse they surge and swarm,

Shouting for the Priest. Again,
Hark you, for "the Priest" they shout,
Pray make haste! I much misdoubt,
They may scarcely prove humane!

BRAND.

Never will I hide my face
In the crowd that you command;
Let them seek me: here I stand.

THE MAYOR.

Are you sane?

BRAND.

The path you pace
Is too narrow for my tread.

THE MAYOR.

And 'twill still grow less and less
As the people push ahead.
Zounds! They spurn at rod and check!
Parsons, Dean, and Corporation
Jostled to the brimming beck—!
Quickly, friend, make application
Of the scourge of your persuasion!
Ha, too late, they smash the line;
The procession is a wreck!

The multitude stream in, and break in wild disorder through the procession to the church.

VOICES.

Priest!

OTHERS.

[*Pointing up to the Church steps, where* BRAND *stands.*]

See yonder!

OTHERS AGAIN.

Give the sign!

THE DEAN.

[*Jostled in the throng.*]

Mayor, Mayor, control them, pray!

THE MAYOR.

All my words are thrown away!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

[*To* BRAND.]

Speak to them, and cast a gleam
On their spirits' troubled stream!
What you summon'd us to see,
Was it Feast or foolery?

BRAND.

O, there stirs a current, then,
In these stagnant waters.—Men,
At the crossway stand ye: choose!
W h o l l y ye must will to lose
The old vesture of your lust,
Utterly anew be clad,
Ere our Temple from the dust
Rises, as it shall and must!

OFFICIALS.

He is raving!

CLERGY.

He is mad!

BRAND.

Yes, I was so, when I thought
Ye in some sense also wrought
For the God who hateth Lies!
When I dream'd that I could lure
To your hearts His Spirit pure
By a feat of compromise.
Small the Church was; logic thence
Palter'd to the inference:
Twice the size—that cannot fail;
Fivefold,—that must needs prevail!
O, I saw not that the call
Was for N o t h i n g or else A l l.
Down that easy way I reel'd,
But to-day the Lord has spoken,
In this very hour has peal'd
Overhead the awful blast
Of His Judgment-trump at last,—
And I listen'd, in the wind
Of my anguish, baffled, broken,—
Even as David, having sinn'd—;
Now all hesitation dies.
Men! The Devil is c o m p r o m i s e !

THE MULTITUDE.

[*With growing excitement.*]

Down with them that quench'd our light
Sapp'd the marrow of our might!

BRAND.

In your souls the demon dwells
That has bound you with his spells.
You have put your powers at mart,
You have cleft yourselves in twain;
Discord therefore numbs your brain,
Petrifies your hollow heart.
To the Church to-day what drew you?
But the show, the show—nought else!—
Roll of organ, clash of bells,—
And to feel the tingle through you
Of a speaking-furnace dart,
As it lisps and lilts and prattles,
As it rolls and roars and rattles,
By the strictest rules of Art!

THE DEAN

[*To himself.*]

The Mayor's chatter, he must mean!

THE MAYOR.

[*Likewise.*]

That's the twaddle of the Dean!

BRAND.

Nothing but the altar-glow
Of the Festival you know.
Get you home then to your sloth,
Get you home to toil and stress,
Soul as well as body clothe
In its common work-day dress,—
And the Bible slumber sound
Till the next Saint's day comes round.

O, it was not to this end
That the Offering-cup I drain'd!
I the Greater Church ordain'd,
That its shadow might descend,
Not alone on Faith and Creed
But on everything in life
That by God's leave lives indeed;—
On our daily strain and strife,
Midnight weeping, evening rest,
Youth's impetuous delight,
All that harbours of good right,
Mean or precious, in the breast.
Yonder foss's hidden thunder,
And the beck that sparkles under,
And the bellow of wild weather,
And the murmurous ocean's tongue
Should have melted, soul-possess'd,
With the organ's roll together,
And the gather'd people's song.
Sweep this lying Labour hence!
Mighty only in pretence!
Stricken inly with decay
On its consecration day,—
Symbol of your impotence
All the germs of soul you aim
By divided toil to maim;
For the week's six days ye drag
To the deepest deep God's flag,
For one only of the seven,
Let it flutter forth to heaven!

VOICES FROM THE THRONG.

Lead us, lead us! Tempest lowers!
Lead us, and the day is ours!

THE DEAN.

Do not hear him! Nought he knows
Of the Faith a Christian owes!

BRAND.

Ay, thou nam'st the flaw whereby
Both the throng, and thou and I,
Are beset! To souls alone
Faith is possible,—show me o n e !
Show me one that his best treasure
Has not inly flung to waste
In his fumbling, or his haste!
First, the reeling plunge for pleasure
To the tabor's juggling strain
Till the zest of pleasure's slain;
Then, soul-ruins, charr'd and stark,
Turn to dance before the Ark!
When the cup's last liquor slips
Through the brain-worn cripple's lips,
Ho! 'tis time to pray and mend,
Sure of pardon in the end.
First God's image you outwear,
Live the beast within you bare,
Then to Mercy cry your needs,
Seeking God—as invalids!
So, His Kingdom's overthrown.
What should He with souls effete
Grovelling at His mercy-seat?
Said He not that then alone
When your lifeblood pulses tense
Through all veins of soul and sense,
Ye His kingdom shall inherit?
Children ye must be to share it;

No man hobbles through its gate.
Come then, ye whose cheek is rife
With the bloom of childhood yet
To the greater Church of Life!

THE MAYOR.

Open it then!

THE MULTITUDE.

[*Crying out as in anguish.*]

No! Not this!

BRAND.

It has neither mark nor bound,
But its floor the green earth is,
Mead and mountain, sea and sound;
And the overarching sky
Is its only canopy.
There shall all thy work be wrought
As an anthem for God's ear,
There thy week-day toil be sought
With no sacrilege to fear.
There the World be like a tree
Folded in its shielding bark;
Faith and Action blended be.
There shall daily labour fuse
With right Teaching and right Use,
Daily drudgery be one
With star-flights beyond the sun,
One with Yule-tide revelry
And the Dance before the Ark.

[*A stormy agitation passes over the multitude; some retire; most press close about* BRAND.

A Thousand Voices.

Light is kindled in the dark;—
L i f e and serving God's the same!

The Dean.

Woe on us! He wins them—hark!
Mayor, sexton, beadle, clerk!

The Mayor.

[*Aside.*]

Do not scream so, o' God's name!
With a bull who wants a bout?
Let him roar his ravin out!

Brand.

[*To the multitude.*]

Hence—away! God is afar!
Cannot be where such men are!
Fair His kingdom is and free!
[*Locks the church-door and takes the keys in his hand.*]
Here I will be priest no more.
I revoke my gift;—from me
No man shall receive the key
Of the yet unopen'd door!
[*Throws the keys into the river.*]
Wilt thou in, thou slave of clay,—
Through the crypt-hole worm thy way;
Lithe thy back is, creep and ply;
From that charnel let thy sigh
Roam the earth with venom'd breath,
Like the flagging gasp of death!

THE MAYOR.

[*Aside with relief.*]

Ha, h i s hope of knighthood's dim!

THE DEAN.

[*Similarly.*]

Well; no bishopric for h i m !

BRAND.

Come thou, young man—fresh and free—
Let a life-breeze lighten thee
From this dim vault's clinging dust.
Conquer with me! For thou must
One day waken, one day rise,
Nobly break with compromise;—
Up, and fly the evil days,
Fly the maze of middle ways,
Strike the foeman full and fair,
Battle to the death declare!

THE MAYOR.

Hold! I'll read the Riot Act!

BRAND.

Read! With you I break my pact.

THE MULTITUDE.

Show the way, and we will follow!

BRAND.

Over frozen height and hollow,
Over all the land we'll fare,

Loose each soul-destroying snare
That this people holds in fee,
Lift and lighten, and set free,
Blot the vestige of the beast,
Each a Man and each a Priest,
Stamp anew the outworn brand,
Make a Temple of the land.

[*The multitude, including the* SEXTON *and* SCHOOLMASTER, *throng around him.* BRAND *is lifted on to their shoulders.*

MANY VOICES.

'Tis a great Time! Visions fair
Dazzle through the noontide glare.

[*The great mass of the assemblage streams away up the valley; a few remain.*

THE DEAN.

[*To the departing crowd.*]

O, ye blinded ones, what would you?
Lo! behind his seeming sooth
Satan scheming to delude you!

THE MAYOR.

Ho there! Turn! Folks born to track
Safe home-waters still and smooth!
Stop!—ye go to ruin and wrack!—
(Dogs! And not a word comes back!)

THE DEAN.

Think of household and of home!

VOICES FROM THE MULTITUDE.

To a greater Home we come!

THE MAYOR.

Think of meadow-plot and field;
Think of teeming stall and fold!

VOICES.

Heavenly dews did manna yield
When the chosen starved of old!

THE DEAN.

Hark! your women cry in chorus!

VOICES.

[*In the distance.*]

Ours they are not if they quail!

THE DEAN.

"Father's gone!" your children wail.

THE WHOLE MULTITUDE.

Be against us, or be for us!

THE DEAN.

[*Gazes awhile with folded hands after them; then dejectedly.*]

By his faithless flock deserted
Stands the old shepherd, heavy-hearted,
Plunder'd to the very skin!

THE MAYOR.

[*Shaking his fist at* BRAND.]

H i s the scandal; h i s the sin!
But we'll shortly win the fight!

THE DEAN.

[*Almost breaking down.*]

Win? Of all our people cheated?—

THE MAYOR.

Ay, but we are not defeated,
If I know my lambs aright!

[*Follows them.*

THE DEAN.

Whither will he, in heaven's name?
As I live, he's after them!
Ha, my drooping courage rises,
I will also do and dare,—
Make assaults and capture prizes!
Bring my steed;—that is, prepare
A safe, steady mountain mare! [*They go.*

By the highest farms in the valley. The land rises in the background and passes into great barren mountains. Rain.

BRAND, *followed by the multitude—men, women, and children,—comes up the slopes.*

BRAND.

Look onward! Triumph flies ahead!
Your homes are hidden in the deep,

And over it, from steep to steep,
The storm his cloudy tent has spread.
Forget the pit of sloth ye trod,
Fly free aloft, ye sons of God!

A Man.

Wait; my old father is dead beaten.

Another.

Since yesterday I've nothing eaten——

Several.

Ay, still our hunger, slake our thirst!

Brand.

On, on, across the mountain first!

Schoolmaster.

Which way?

Brand.

All ways alike are right
That reach the goal. This way pursue——

A Man.

Nay, it is steep, and 'twill be night
Ere we are well upon the height.

The Sexton.

And that way lies the Ice-church too.

Brand

The steep way is the short way still.

A Woman.

My foot is sore!

Another.

My child is ill!

A Third.

Where shall I get a drop to drink?

The Schoolmaster.

Priest, feed the people;—see, they sink.

Many Voices.

A miracle! A miracle!

Brand.

O, the slave-stamp has branded deep;
The toil you shirk, the hire you crave.
Up, and shake off this deadly sleep,—
Or else, get back into the grave!

The Schoolmaster.

Ay, he is right; first face the foe;
The hire comes afterwards, you know.

Brand.

It shall, as sure as God looks forth
Over the breadth and depth of Earth!

Many Voices.

He's prophesying! He's prophesying!

SEVERAL.

Hark, priest, will it be warm, this fight?

OTHERS.

And bloody? And will it last till night?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Aside.*]

I trust there is no risk of dying?

A MAN.

Priest, must we really face the fire?

ANOTHER.

What is my portion of the hire?

A WOMAN.

You're sure I shall not lose my son?

THE SEXTON.

By Tuesday will the field be won?

BRAND.

[*Looking round in bewilderment on the throng.*]

What would you know? What's your demand?

THE SEXTON.

Firstly, how long we shall make war.
Then, of our total loss therein.
And finally,—how much we win?

BRAND.

This ye demand?

THE SEXTON.

Yes, 'faith; before
We did not rightly understand.

BRAND.

[*Deeply moved.*]

Then ye shall understand it now!

THE MULTITUDE.

[*Thronging closer.*]

Speak! Speak!

BRAND.

How long the war will last?
As long as life, till ye have cast
All ye possess before the Lord,
And slain the Spirit of Accord;
Until your stiff will bend and bow,
And every coward scruple fall
Before the bidding: Nought or All!
What you will lose? Your gods abhorr'd,
Your feasts to Mammon and the Lord,
The glittering bonds ye do not loathe,
And all the pillows of your sloth!
What you will gain? A will that's whole,—
A soaring faith, a single soul,
The willingness to lose, that gave
Itself rejoicing to the grave;—
A crown of thorns on every brow;—
That is the wage you're earning now!

THE MULTITUDE.

[*With a furious cry.*]

Betray'd! Betray'd! Deceived! Misled!

BRAND.

I say but what I always said!

SEVERAL.

You promised us the victor's prize;
And now it turns to sacrifice!

BRAND.

I promised victory,—and to you
Victory shall indeed be due.
But every man who fights in front
Must perish in the battle's brunt;
If that he dares not, let him lay
His arms down ere the battle-day.
The flag's predestined to surrender
That has a timorous defender;
And he that shudders at the cost,
Ere he is wounded, he is lost.

THE MULTITUDE.

He insolently bids us die
To serve unborn posterity!

BRAND.

Through thorny steeps of sacrifice,
The way unto our Canaan lies.
Triumph through death! I call you all,
As Champions of God to fall!

THE SEXTON.

Well, we are in a pretty plight!
No mercy to expect below——

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Nay, we have bade the dale good-night.

THE SEXTON.

And forward, forward, who will go?

SOME.

To death with him!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

'Twere pity, so!
We want a general, you know!

WOMEN.

[*Pointing in terror downwards.*]

The Dean! The Dean!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

[*To the throng.*]

Nay, never fear!

THE DEAN.

[*Comes in, followed by some of those who remained behind.*]

O my beloved! O my sheep!
To the old shepherd's voice give ear!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

[*To the throng.*]

A home no more we have below;
Better we follow up the steep!

THE DEAN.

That ye could grieve my heart so sore,
And pierce me with a wound so deep!

BRAND.

Thou wast their soul's scourge evermore!

THE DEAN.

Don't heed him! He is stuffing you
With idle promises.

SEVERAL.

That's true!

THE DEAN.

But we are gracious, and forgive
Where we true penitence perceive.
O, turn your eyes into your hearts
And mark the diabolic arts
With which he won you to his aid!

THE MULTITUDE.

Ay, sure enough; we were betray'd!

THE DEAN.

And then consider; what can ye,
A knot of scatter'd dalesmen, do?

Are high heroic deeds for you?
Can ye give bondsmen liberty?
You have your daily task; pursue it!
Whatever is beyond, eschew it!
What can your prowess brave or baulk?
Ye have your humble homes to keep.
What would you between eagle and hawk?
What would you between wolf and bear?
Ye fall but to the strongest's share.
O my beloved! O my sheep!

THE MULTITUDE.

Ay, woe on us,—his words are true!

THE SEXTON.

And yet, when from the dale we drew,
Upon ourselves we locked the door;
We have no home there, as before.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

No, he has open'd all our eyes,
Laid bare sins, sicknesses, and lies;
The sleepy people sleeps no more;
And deadly to our waking seems
The life that satisfied our dreams.

THE DEAN.

Ah, trust me, that will soon pass over.
All will return to the old state,
If you will just be still and wait.
These folks, I'll wage, will soon recover
The wonted calm they have foregone.

BRAND.

Choose, men and women!

SOME.

Home!

OTHERS.

Too late!

Too late! Along the height press on!

THE MAYOR.

[*Enters in haste.*]

O lucky chance I caught you up!

WOMEN.

Ah, dear kind master, don't be stern!

THE MAYOR.

Not now; provided you return!
A better day, a brighter season
Dawns for us! If you'll hark to reason,
You'll all be rich men ere you sup!

SEVERAL.

How so?

THE MAYOR.

There is a herring-horde
By millions swimming in the fjord!

THE MULTITUDE.

What does he say?

THE MAYOR.

Set all to rights!
Fly from these stormy uplands bare.
Till now the herrings swam elsewhere;
Now, friends, at last, our barren bights
Good fortune tardily requites.

BRAND.

Between God's summons choose, and his!

THE MAYOR.

Consult your own shrewd faculties!

THE DEAN.

A Miracle Divine is here!
A Providential Token clear!
How oft I dreamt that this befell!
I took it for a nightmare's spell;
And now its meaning is revealed——

BRAND.

Yourselves you ruin, if you yield!

MANY.

A herring-horde!

THE MAYOR.

By millions told!

THE DEAN.

For wife and children, bread and gold!

THE MAYOR.

You see, then, this is not an hour
To waste your forces in a fray,
And against energies whose power
Strikes in the very Dean dismay.
Now ye have other ends in view
Than idly pining for the sky.
Heaven, trust me, can your arms defy,
And God's not easy to subdue.
Don't mix yourselves in others' strife,
But gather in the proffer'd fruit,
That is a practical pursuit,
That does not call for blood and knife;
That asks no sacrifice of life,
And gives you its good things to boot!

BRAND.

Just sacrifice is His demand,—
Flame-writ in Heaven by His hand!

THE DEAN.

Ah, if you feel a call that way,
Just come to me next Sunday, say,
And on my word I'll——

THE MAYOR.
[*Interrupting.*]

Yes, yes, yes!

THE SEXTON.
[*Aside to the* DEAN.]

Shall I be suffer'd keep my place?

THE SCHOOLMASTER.
[*Similarly.*]

Shall I be forced to leave my school?

THE DEAN.
[*Aside to them.*]

If these stiff necks you overrule
We will deal mildly with your case.

THE MAYOR.

Away—away with you! time flies!

THE SEXTON.

To boat, to boat, whoever's wise!

SOME.

Ay, but the priest?——

THE SEXTON.

O, leave the fool!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

Here speaks the Lord as clearly, look,
As in an open printed book!

THE MAYOR.

Leave him; that's law and justice too;
With babbling tales he flouted you.

SEVERAL.

He lied to us!

THE DEAN.

His creed's accursed;
And think, he never got a First!

SOME.

Never got w h a t ?

THE MAYOR.

A grain of sense.

THE SEXTON.

Nay, of that we have evidence!

THE DEAN.

Vainly his mother's dying breath
For the last sacrament made suit!

THE MAYOR.

His child he almost did to death!

THE SEXTON.

His wife as well!

WOMEN.

O heartless brute!

THE DEAN.

Bad spouse, bad father, and bad son,—
Worse Christian surely there is none!

MANY VOICES.

Our ancient Church he overthrew!

OTHERS.

And shot the bolt upon the new!

OTHERS AGAIN.

He wreck'd us in a roaring stream!

THE MAYOR.

He pilfer'd my Asylum-scheme!

BRAND.

On every branded brow I see
This generation's destiny.

THE WHOLE THRONG.

[*Roaring.*]

Hoo, never heed him! Stone and knife!
Send the fiend flying for his life!

[BRAND *is driven with stones out into the wild. His pursuers then return.*

THE DEAN.

O my beloved! O my sheep!
Back to your homes and hearths once more;
Your eyes in true repentance steep,
And see what blessings are in store.
God in His mercy is so good,
He asketh not the guiltless blood;—
And our authorities as well
Are singularly placable;
Mayor, magistrate, and sheriff too,

Will not be over hard on you;
And for myself, that large humanity
That marks our modern Christianity
Is mine; your rulers will descend
And dwell with you, as friend with friend.

THE MAYOR.

But should abuses be detected,
They must, past question, be corrected.
When we've a little time to move,
I'll have appointed a commission,
To seek how best we may improve
Your intellectual condition.
Some clergymen it should include
Such as the Dean and I think good,—
And furthermore, if you prefer,
The Sexton and the Schoolmaster,
With others of a humbler sort,—
You'll all be satisfied, in short.

THE DEAN.

Yes, we'll relieve your burdens all,
As ye this day have brought relief
To your old shepherd in his grief.
Let each find comfort in the thought
That here a miracle was wrought.
Farewell! Good fortune to your haul!

THE SEXTON.

Ah, there's true charity, if you will!

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

So meek and unassuming still.

WOMEN.

So kindly, and so nice!

OTHER WOMEN.

And then
Such condescending gentlemen!

THE SEXTON.

T h e y don't demand the martyr's throe.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

The Lord's Prayer is not all they know.
[*The throng passes on downwards.*

THE DEAN.

[*To the Mayor.*]

Ah, that has taken. It is plain
A great revulsion is in train;
For, by God's blessed benefaction,
There is a thing men call Reaction.

THE MAYOR.

'Twas m y achievement, to control
The infant riot ere it grew.

THE DEAN.

Ah, to the miracle most was due.

THE MAYOR.

What miracle?

THE DEAN.

The herring-shoal!

THE MAYOR.

[*Whistling.*]

That was, I need not say, a lie.

THE DEAN.

Really, a lie?

THE MAYOR.

I just let loose
At the first fancy that came by;
Is it a sin such means to use
In such a cause?

THE DEAN.

God bless me, no
Need is an adequate excuse.

THE MAYOR.

And then, to-morrow, when the glow
Of agitation's dead, or dying,
What will it matter if the end
Was gain'd by telling truth, or lying?

THE DEAN.

I am no formalist, my friend.
[*Looks up into the wild.*]
But is't not Brand that yonder drags
His slow course upward?

THE MAYOR.

Ay, you're right!
A lonely warrior off to fight!

THE DEAN.

Nay, there's another too—that lags
Far in the rear!

THE MAYOR.

Why;—that is Gerd;
The herdsman's worthy of the herd.

THE DEAN.

[*Facetiously.*]

When he has still'd his losing whim,
This is the epitaph for him:
"Here lieth Brand; his tale's a sad one;
O n e soul he saved,—and that a mad one!"

THE MAYOR.

[*With his finger to his nose.*]

But, on reflection, I have some
Misgivings that the folk's decree
A little lack'd humanity.

THE DEAN.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*]

V o x p o p u l i v o x D e i. Come!

[*They go.*

High up among the mountains. A storm is rising and chasing the clouds heavily over the snow-slopes;

black peaks and summits appear here and there, and are veiled again by the mist.

BRAND *comes, bleeding and broken, up the mountain.*

BRAND.

[*Stops and looks backward.*]

From the vale they follow'd thronging,
Never o n e has reached the height.
Through all bosoms thrill'd the longing
For a greater Day's dawn-light;
Through all souls subduing strode
The alarum-call of God.
But the sacrifice they dread!
Will, the weakling, hides his head;—
O n e man died for them of yore,—
Cowardice is crime no more!
[*Sinks down on a stone, and looks with shrinking gaze around.*]
Oft I shudder'd at their doom;
And I walk'd, with horror quivering,
As a little child walks shivering
Amid shrieking shapes that loom
In a dim and haunted room.
But I check'd my bosom's quaking,
And bethought me, and consoled it:
Out of doors the day is breaking,
Not of night it is, this gloom,
But the shutters barr'd enfold it;
And I thought, the day inwelling,
Rich with summer's golden bloom,
Shall anon prevail, expelling
All the darkness that is dwelling
In the dim and haunted room.

O how bitter my dismay!
Pitchy darkness on me broke,—
And, without, a nerveless folk
Sat forlorn by fjord and bay,
Dim traditions treasuring
While their sotted souls decay.
Even as, year by year, the king
Treasured up his Snefrid dead,
Loosed the linen shroud o'erspread
By her mute heart listening low,
Still upon hope's fragments fed,
Thinking, "*Now* the roses red
In her pallid ashes blow!"
None, like him, arose, and gave
The grave's debt unto the grave;
None among them wise to know:
"Dreaming cannot kindle dust,
Down into the earth it must,
Dust is only made to breed
Nurture for the new-sown seed."
Night, black night,—and night again
Over children, women, men!
O could I with levin-flame
Save them from the straw-death's shame!
[*Leaps up.*]
Gloomy visions I see sweep
Like the Wild Hunt through the night.
Lo, the Time is Tempest-dight,
Calls for heroes, death to dare,
Calls for naked steel to leap,
And for scabbards to hang bare;—
Kinsfolk, lo, to battle riding,
While their gentle brothers, hiding,
From the hat of darkness peep.

And yet more I do divine—
All the horror of their shame,—
Men that shriek and wives that whine,
Deaf to every cry and claim,
See them on their brows imprinting
"Poor folks sea-bound" for their name,
"Humble farthings of God's minting!"
Pale they listen to the fray,—
Willing-weakness for their shield.—
Rainbow o'er the mead of May,
Flag, where fliest thou now afield?
Where's that tricolor to-day,—
Which the wind of myriad song,
Beat and bellied from the mast
Till a zealot king at last
Split it into teeth and tongue?
But you used the tongue to brag;
And what boots the toothed flag
If the dragon dares not bite?
Would the folk had spared those cheers,
And the zealot king those shears!
Four-square flag of peace suffices,
When a stranded craft capsizes,
To give warning of her plight!
  Direr visions, worse foreboding,
Glare upon me through the gloom!
Britain's smoke-cloud sinks corroding
On the land in noisome fume;
Smirches all its tender bloom,
All its gracious verdure dashes,
Sweeping low with breath of bane,
Stealing sunlight from the plain,
Showering down like rain of ashes
On the city of God's doom.—

Fouler featured men are grown;—
Dropping water's humming drone
Echoes through the mine's recesses:
Bustling, smug, a pigmy pack
Plucks its prey from ore's embraces,
Walks with crooked soul and back,
Glares like dwarfs with greedy eyes
For the golden glittering lies;
Speechless souls with lips unsmiling,
Hearts that fall of brothers rends not,
Nor their own to fury frets,
Hammer-wielding, coining, filing;
Light's last gleam forlornly flies;
For this bastard folk forgets
That the need of willing ends not
When the power of willing dies!
Direr visions, direr doom,
Glare upon me through the gloom.
Craft, the wolf, with howl and yell,
Bays at Wisdom, sun of earth;
Cries of ruin ring to North,
Call to arms by fjord and fell;
And the pigmy, quaking, grim,
Hisses: "What is that to him?"
Let the other nations glow,
Let the mighty meet the foe,
We can ill afford to bleed,—
We are weak, may fairly plead
From a giants' war exemption,
Need not offer All as meed
For our fraction of Redemption
Not for us the cup He drank,
Not for us the thorny wreath
In His temples drove its teeth,

Not for us the spear-shaft sank
In the Side whose life was still.
Not for us the burning thrill
Of the nails that clove and tore.
We, the weak, the least accounted,
Battle-summons may ignore!
Not for us the Cross He mounted!
Just the stirrup-slash's stain,
Just the gash the cobbler scored
In the shoulder of the Lord,
Is our portion of His pain!
[*Throws himself down in the snow and covers his face; presently he looks up.*]
Was I dreaming! Dream I still?
Mist-enshrouded is the hill.
Were those visions but the vain
Phantoms of a fever'd brain?
Is the image clean outworn
Whereunto Man's soul was born?
Is the Maker's spirit fled——
[*Listening.*]
Ha, what song breaks overhead?

INVISIBLE CHOIR.

[*In the sough of the storm.*]

Never shalt thou win His spirit;
Thou in mortal flesh was born:
Spurn his bidding or revere it;
Equally thou art forlorn.

BRAND.

[*Repeats the words, and says softly.*]

Woe's me; I may well fear it!
Stood He not, and saw me pray,

Sternly smote my prayer away?
All I loved He has demanded,
All the ways of light seal'd fast,
Made me battle single-handed,
And be overthrown at last!

THE CHOIR.

[*Louder, above him.*]

Worm, thou mayst not win His spirit,—
For Death's cup thou hast consumed;
Fear His Will, or do not fear it,
Equally thy work is doom'd.

BRAND.

[*Softly.*]

Agnes, Alf, the gladsome life
When unrest and pain I knew not—
I exchanged for tears and strife,
In my own heart plunged the knife,—
But the fiend of evil slew not.

THE CHOIR.

[*Tender and alluring.*]

Dreamer, thine is not His spirit,
Nought to Him thy gifts are worth;
Heaven thou never shalt inherit,
Earth-born creature, live for Earth!

BRAND.

[*Breaks into soft weeping.*]

Alf and Agnes, come unto me!
Lone I sit upon this peak!

Keen the north wind pierces through me,
Phantoms seize me, chill ones, meek——!

He looks up; a glimmering space opens and clears in the mist; the APPARITION *of a* WOMAN *stands in it, brightly clad, with a cloak over its shoulders. It is* AGNES.

THE PHANTOM.

[*Smiles, and spreads its arms towards him.*]

See, again, Brand, I have found thee!

BRAND.

[*Starting up in bewilderment.*]

Agnes! Agnes! What is this?

THE PHANTOM.

Dearest, it is thy release
From the fever'd dreams that bound thee!

BRAND.

Agnes! Agnes!

[*He is hurrying towards her.*

THE PHANTOM.

[*Screams.*]

Cross not! Deep
Rolls between us the abyss,
Where the mountain-torrents sweep!

[*Tenderly.*]

Thou dost dream not, neither sleep,
Nor with phantoms wagest war;

Dear, by sickness thou wast wasted,—
Frenzy's bitter cup hast tasted,
Dreamt, thy wife had fled afar.

BRAND.

Oh, thou livest! Blessed be——!

THE PHANTOM.

[*Hastily.*]

Peace! Of that no murmur now!
Follow fast, the moments press.

BRAND.

Oh, but Alf!

THE PHANTOM.

Alive, no less.

BRAND.

Lives!

THE PHANTOM.

And with unfaded brow!
All thy sorrows did but seem!
All thy batles were a dream,
Alf is with thy mother; she
Vigorous yet, and stalwart he;
Still the old Church stands entire;
Pluck it down if thou desire;—
And the dalesmen still drudge on
As they did in good days gone.

BRAND.

"Good!"

THE PHANTOM.

For days of peace they were.

BRAND.

"Peace?"

THE PHANTOM.

O haste thee, Brand, O fly!

BRAND.

Woe, I dream!

THE PHANTOM.

Thy dream's gone by,
But thou needest sheltering care——

BRAND.

I am strong.

THE PHANTOM.

Ah me, not yet;
Still the fell dream lies in wait.
Once again from wife and child
It shall sweep thee, cloud-beguiled,
Once again thy soul obscure,—
If thou wilt not seek the cure.

BRAND.

Oh, vouchsafe it!

THE PHANTOM.

Thou availest,
Thou alone, that cure to reach.

BRAND.

Name it then!

THE PHANTOM.

The aged leech,
Who has conn'd so many a page,—
The unfathomably sage,
He discovered where thou ailest.
All the phantoms of thy strife,
Three words conjured them to life.
Them thou boldly must recall,
From thy memory efface them,
From thy conscience blot, erase them;
At their bidding, lo, thou burnest
In this maddening blast of bane;—
O forget them, if thou yearnest
To make white thy soul again!

BRAND.

Say, what are they?

THE PHANTOM.

Nought or all.

BRAND.

[*Reeling back.*]

Is it so?

THE PHANTOM.

So sure as I
Am alive, and thou wilt die.

BRAND.

Woe on us! The sword once more
Swings above us, as before!

THE PHANTOM.

Brand, be kind; my breast is warm;
Clasp me close in thy strong arm;—
Let us fly where summer's sun——

BRAND.

Never more that plague shall bind me

THE PHANTOM.

Ah, Brand, all is not yet won.

BRAND.

[*Shaking his head.*]

I have flung that dream behind me.
Me no more that phantom-strife's
Horror thrills;—but Life's! but Life's!

THE PHANTOM.

Life's?

BRAND.

Come, Agnes, where I lead!

THE PHANTOM.

Brand, what is it thou wilt do?

BRAND.

What I must: the d r e a m make t r u e,—
Live the vision into deed.

THE PHANTOM.

Ha, thou canst not! Think but whither
That road led thee

BRAND.

Thither! Thither!

THE PHANTOM.

What thou dared'st, dream-beguiled,
Wilt thou, whole and waking, dare?

BRAND.

Whole and waking.

THE PHANTOM.

Lose the child?

BRAND.

Lose it.

THE PHANTOM.

Brand!

BRAND.

I must.

THE PHANTOM.

And tear
Me all bleeding from the snare?
With the rods of sacrifice
Scourge me to the death?

BRAND.

I must.

THE PHANTOM.

Quench the glow of sunny skies,
Turn all bright things into dust,

Never pluck life's fruitage fair,
Never be upborne by song?
Ah, so many memories throng!

BRAND.

Nought avails. Lose not thy prayer.

THE PHANTOM.

Heed'st thou not thy martyr's meed?
Baffled where thou sought'st to waken,
Stoned by all, by all forsaken?

BRAND.

Not for recompense I bleed;
Not for trophies do I fight.

THE PHANTOM.

For a race that walks entomb'd!

BRAND.

One to many can give light.

THE PHANTOM.

All their generation's doom'd.

BRAND.

Much availeth one will's might.

THE PHANTOM.

"One" with fiery sword of yore
Man of Paradise bereft!

At the gate a gulf he cleft;—
Over that thou mayst not soar!

BRAND.

But the path of y e a r n i n g ' s left!

THE PHANTOM.

[*Vanishes in a thunder-clap; the mist fills the place where it stood; and a piercing scream is heard, as of one flying.*]
Die! Earth cannot use thee more!

BRAND.

[*Stands a moment in bewilderment.*]

Out into the mist it leapt,—
Plumy wings of falcon beating,
Down along the moorland swept.
For a finger it was treating,
That the hand might be its prize—!
Ha, the Spirit of Compromise!

GERD.

[*Comes with a rifle.*]

Hast thou seen the falcon?

BRAND.

Yea;
This time I have seen him.

GERD.

Say,
Quick, which way thou saw'st him fly;
We will chase him, thou and I.

BRAND.

Steel and bullet he defies;
Oftentimes you think he flies
Stricken by the mortal lead,—
But draw near to strike him dead
Up he starts again, secure
With the old cajoling lure.

GERD.

See, the hunter's gun I've got,
Steel and silver is the shot;
'Trow, my wits are less astray
Than they reckon!

BRAND.

Have thy way!

[*Going.*

GERD.

Priest, thou walkest lame afoot.

BRAND.

I was hunted.

GERD.

Red thy brow
As the blood of thy heart's root!

BRAND.

I was beaten.

GERD.

Musical
Was thy voice of old, that now
Rattles like the leaves of Fall.

BRAND.

I was——

GERD.

What?

BRAND.

By one and all
Spurn'd.

GERD.

[*Looking at him with great eyes.*]

Aha,—I know thee now!
For the priest I took thee;—pest
Take the priest and all the rest!
The One, greatest Man art thou—

BRAND.

So I madly dared to trust.

GERD.

Let me look upon thy hands!

BRAND.

On my hands?

GERD.

They're pierced and torn!
In thy hair the blood-dew stands,
Riven by the fanged thorn
In thy forehead fiercely thrust,
Thou the crucifix didst span!
In my childhood Father told me
'Twas another, long ago,

Far away, that suffer'd so;—
Now I see he only fool'd me;—
Thou art the Redeeming man!

BRAND.

Get thee hence!

GERD.

Shall I not fall
Low before thy feet and pray?

BRAND.

Hence!

GERD.

T h o u gavest the blood away
That hath might to save us all!

BRAND.

Oh, no saving plank I see,
In my own soul's agony!

GERD.

Take the rifle! Shoot them dead—

BRAND.

[*Shaking his head.*]

Man must struggle till he falls.

GERD.

Oh, not thou; thou art the head!
By the nails thy hands were gored;—
Thou art chosen; thou art Lord.

BRAND.

I'm the meanest worm that crawls.

GERD.

[*Looks up; the clouds are lifting.*]

Know'st thou where thou stand'st?

BRAND.

[*Gazing before him.*]

Below

The first step of the ascent;
It is rar, and I am faint.

GERD.

[*More fiercely.*]

Say! Where art thou, dost thou know?

BRAND.

Yes, now falls the misty shroud.

GERD.

Yes, it falls: without a cloud
Svartetind impales the blue!

BRAND.

[*Looking up.*]

Svartetind? The ice-church!

GERD.

Yea!

Here thou camest churchward, too!

BRAND.

Hence! a thousand miles away!—
How I long to fly afar,
Where the sunlight and the balm
And the holy hush of calm,
And Life's summer-kingdoms are!
[*Bursts into tears.*]
Jesus, I have cried and pleaded,—
From thy bosom still outcast;
Thou hast pass'd me by unheeded
As a well-worn word is passed;
Of salvation's vesture, stain'd
With the wine of tears unfeign'd,
Let me clasp one fold at last!

GERD.

[*Pale.*]

What is this? Then weepest, thou,
Hot tears, till thy cheek is steaming,—
And the glacier's death-shroud streaming
Silently from crag and crest,—
And my memory's frozen tides
Melt to weeping in my breast,—
And the snowy surplice glides
Down the Ice-priest's giant sides—
[*Trembling.*]
Man, why wept'st thou not till now?

BRAND.

[*Radiant, clear, and with an air of renewed youth.*]

Through the Law an ice-track led,—
Then broke summer overhead!

Till to-day I strove alone
To be God's pure tablet-stone;—
From to-day my life shall stream
Lambent, glowing, as a dream.
The ice-fetters break away,
I can weep,—and kneel,—and pray!
[*Sinks upon his knees.*

GERD.

[*Looks askance upwards, and then, softly and timidly.*]

There he sits, the ugly sprite!
'Tis his shadow sweeps the land,
Where he flogs the mountain height
With his flapping vans in flight.
Now Redemption is at hand——
If the silver will but bite!

[*Puts the rifle to her cheek and shoots. A hollow roar, as of distant thunder, is heard far up the precipice.*

BRAND.

[*Starting up.*]

Ha, what dost thou?

GERD.

Down he slides!
I have hit him;—down he swings,—
Shrieking, till the echo rings;
Plumes in thousand from his sides
Flutter down the beetling brae;—
See how large he looms, how white—!
Ha, he's rolling down this way!

BRAND.

[*Sinking down.*]

Blood of children must be spilt
To atone the parent's guilt!

GERD.

Tenfold vaster at his fall
Grew the tent of Heaven above!
See him tumble; see him sprawl—!
Ah, I will not shudder more;
He is white, see, as a dove—!
[*Shrieks in terror.*]
Hu, the horrible thunder-roar!
[*Throws herself down in the snow.*

BRAND.

[*Crouches under the descending avalanche, and, looking up, speaks.*]

God, I plunge into death's night,—
Shall they wholly miss thy Light
Who unto man's utmost might
Will'd—?
[*The avalanche buries him; the whole valley is swallowed up.*

A VOICE.

[*Calls through the crashing thunder.*]

He is the God of Love.

THE END

PEER GYNT

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Translated by WILLIAM and CHARLES ARCHER

PEER GYNT

INTRODUCTION*

The publication of *Brand*, in March, 1866, brought Ibsen fame (in Scandinavia) and relieved him from the immediate pressure of poverty. Two months later the Storthing voted him a yearly "poet-pension" of £90; and with this sum, as he wrote to the Minister who had been mainly instrumental in furthering his claim, he felt "his future assured," so that he could henceforth "devote himself without hindrance to his calling." This first glimpse of worldly prosperity, no doubt, brought with it the lighter mood which distinguishes *Peer Gynt* from its predecessor. To call it the gayest of Ibsen's works is not, perhaps, to say very much. Its satire, indeed, is bitter enough; but it is not the work of an unhappy man. The character of Peer Gynt, and many of his adventures, are conceived with unmistakable gusto. Some passages even bear witness to an exuberance of animal spirits which reminds one of Ben Jonson's saying with regard to Shakespeare—"aliquando sufflaminandus erat."

The summer of 1866 Ibsen spent at Frascati, in the Palazzo Gratiosi, where he lived "most comfortably and cheaply." He found Frascati and Tusculum "indescribably delightful." From the windows of his study he could see Soracte, "rising isolated and beautiful from the

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level of the immense plain . . . the battlefield where the chief engagement in the world's history took place." So he writes in a letter to Paul Botten-Hansen, and immediately afterwards proceeds: "I shall soon be setting to work in good earnest. I am still wrestling with my subject, but I know that I shall get the upper hand of the brute before long, and then everything will go smoothly." But was the play here referred to *Peer Gynt?* Probably not; for, three months later, we find him still projecting a historical play, of the period of Christian IV. of Denmark, which was to have had for its hero a Norwegian freebooter named Magnus Heinessön, who came to a tragic end in the year 1589. It is in a letter to Hegel, dated from Rome, January 5, 1867, that we find the first unmistakable reference to *Peer Gynt:* "Now I must tell you that my new work is well under way, and will, if nothing untoward happens, be finished early in the summer. It is to be a long dramatic poem, having as its chief figure one of the Norwegian peasantry's half-mythical, fantastic heroes of *recent* times. It will bear no resemblance to *Brand,* contain no direct polemics and so forth. I have long had the subject in my thoughts; now the entire plan is worked out and written down, and the first act begun. The thing grows as I work at it, and I am certain that you will be satisfied with it."

Two months later (March 8) the poem has "advanced to the middle of the second act." On August 8, he sends to Hegel, from Villa Pisani, Casamicciola, Ischia, the complete manuscript of the first three acts, and writes: "I am curious to hear how you like the poem. I am very hopeful myself. It may interest you to know that Peer

Gynt is a real person, who lived in Gudbrandsdal, probably at the end of last, or beginning of this, century; but of his exploits not much more is known than is to be found in Asbjörnsen's *Norwegian Fairy Tales*, in the section *Pictures from the Mountains*. Thus I have not had very much to build upon; but so much the more liberty has been left me. It would interest me to know what Clemens Petersen thinks of the work." What Clemens Petersen did think we shall presently learn.

On October 18, Ibsen despatched from Sorrento the remainder of his manuscript, and the book was published on November 14. It has often been pointed out (by myself among others) as a very remarkable fact that two such gigantic creations as *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* should have been given to the world in two successive years; but on examination the marvel somewhat dwindles. *Peer Gynt* did not follow so hot-foot upon *Brand* as the bare dates of publication would lead us to suppose. *Brand* was written in the summer of 1865, *Peer Gynt* (as we have seen) in 1867; so that the poet's mind had lain fallow for a whole year (1866) between the two great efforts. It was a long delay in the publication of *Brand* that made its successor seem to tread so close upon its heels. As a matter of fact, he spent a longer time over the actual composition of *Peer Gynt* than over any of his other works, except *Emperor and Galilean*. It usually took him from six weeks to four months to write a play; but *Peer Gynt* cost him nine months' labor.

One or two other references to the origin of *Peer Gynt* may be found in Ibsen's letters. The most important occurs in an autobiographical communication to Peter

Hansen, dated Dresden, October 28, 1870: "After *Brand* came *Peer Gynt*, as though of itself. It was written in Southern Italy, in Ischia and at Sorrento. So far away from one's readers one becomes reckless. This poem contains much that has its origin in the circumstances of my own youth. My own mother—with the necessary exaggerations—served as the model for Åse. (Likewise for Inga in *The Pretenders*)" Twelve years later (1882) Ibsen wrote to George Brandes: "My father was a merchant with a large business and wide connections, and he enjoyed dispensing reckless hospitality. In 1836 he failed, and nothing was left to us except a farm near the town. . . . In writing *Peer Gynt*, I had the circumstances and memories of my own childhood before me when I described the life in the house of 'the rich Jon Gynt.'"

Returning to the above-quoted letter to Peter Hansen, we find this further allusion to *Peer Gynt* and its immediate predecessor and successor in the list of Ibsen's works: "Environment has great influence upon the forms in which imagination creates. May I not, like Christoff in *Jakob von Tyboe*,[1] point to *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, and say: 'See, the wine-cup has done this?' And is there not something in *The League of Youth* [written in Dresden] that suggests 'Knackwurst und Bier'? Not that I would thereby imply any inferiority in the latter play." The transition to prose was no doubt an inevitable step in the evolution of Ibsen's genius; but one wishes he had kept to the "wine-cup" a little longer.

A masterpiece is not a flawless work, but one which has sufficient vitality to live down its faults, until at last we

[1] One of Holberg's most famous comedies.

no longer heed, and almost forget them. *Peer Gynt* had real faults, not a few; and its great merit, as some of us think—its magnificent, reckless profusion of fantasy—could not but be bewildering to its first critics, who had to pronounce upon it before they had (as Ballested[1] would put it) acclimatised themselves to its atmosphere. Its reception, then, was much more dubious than that of *Brand* had been. We find even George Brandes writing of it: "What great and noble powers are wasted on this thankless material! Except in the fourth act, which has no connection with what goes before and after, and is witless in its satire, crude in its irony, and in its latter part scarcely comprehensible, there is almost throughout a wealth of poetry and a depth of thought such as we do not find, perhaps, in any of Ibsen's earlier works. . . . It would be unjust to deny that the book contains great beauties, or that it tells us all, and Norwegians in particular, some important truths; but beauties and truths are of far less value than beauty and truth in the singular, and Ibsen's poem is neither beautiful nor true. Contempt for humanity and self-hatred make a bad foundation on which to build a poetic work. What an unlovely and distorting view of life this is! What acrid pleasure can a poet find in thus sullying human nature?"[2] The friendship between Brandes and Ibsen was at this time just beginning, and—much to Ibsen's credit—it appears to have suffered no check by reason of this outspoken pronouncement.

[1] See *The Lady from the Sea.*

[2] Brandes: *Ibsen and Björnson*, p. 35. London, Heinemann, 1899. Except in regard to the Fourth Act, Dr. Brandes has, in the introduction to *Peer Gynt* in the German collected edition, recanted his early condemnation of the poem.

On the other hand, he resented deeply a criticism by Clemens Petersen, who seems to have been at this time regarded as the æsthetic lawgiver of Copenhagen. Why he should have done so is not very clear; for Petersen professed to prefer *Peer Gynt* to *Brand*, and his criticism on *Brand* Ibsen had apparently accepted without demur. Most of Petersen's article is couched in a very heavy philosophic idiom; but the following extract, though it refers chiefly to *Brand*, may convey some idea of his general objection to both poems:—"When a poet, as Ibsen does in *Brand*, depicts an error, a one-sidedness, which is from first to last presented in an imposing light, it is not sufficient that he should eventually, through a piece of sensational symbolism, let that one-sidedness go to ruin, and it is not sufficient that in the last word of the drama[1] he should utter the name of that with which the one-sidedness should have blended in order to become truth. If he throughout his work shows us this error—in virtue of its strength, if for no other reason—justifying itself as against everything that comes in contact with it, then it is not only in the character depicted that something is lacking, but in the work of art itself. That something is the Ideal, without which the work of art cannot take rank as poetry—the Ideal which here, as so often in art, lies only in the lighting of the picture, but which is nevertheless the saving, the uplifting element. It is to poetry what devotion is to religion. . . . In *Peer Gynt*, as in *Brand*, the ideal is lacking. But this must be said rather less strongly of *Peer Gynt*. There is more fantasy, more real freedom of spirit, less strain and less violence in this

[1] The last words are "deus caritatis."

poem than in *Brand*." The critic then speaks of *Peer Gynt* as being "full of riddles which are insoluble, because there is nothing in them at all." Peer's identification of the Sphinx with the Boyg (Act IV., Sc. 12) he characterises as "tankesvindel"—thought-swindling, or, as we might say, juggling with thought. The general upshot of his considerations is that *Peer Gynt* belongs, with Goldschmidt's *Corsaren*, to the domain of polemical journalism. It "is not poetry, because in the transmutation of reality into art it falls half-way short of the demands both of art and of reality."

Petersen's review is noteworthy, not for its own sake, but for the effect it produced on Ibsen. His letters to Björnson on the subject are the most vivid and spontaneous he ever wrote. Björnson happened to be in Copenhagen when Petersen's article appeared in *Fædrelandet*, and Ibsen seems somehow to have blamed him for not preventing its appearance. "All I reproach you with," he says, "is inaction." But Petersen he accuses of lack of "loyalty," of "an intentional crime against truth and justice." "There is a lie involved in Clemens Petersen's article, not in what he says, but in what he refrains from saying. And he intentionally refrains from saying a great deal. . . . Tell me, now, is Peer Gynt himself not a personality, complete and individual? *I* know that he is. And the mother; is she not?" But the most memorable passage in this memorable letter is the following piece of splendid arrogance: "My book *is* poetry; and if it is not, then it will be. The conception of poetry in our country, in Norway, shall be made to conform to the book." It

certainly seems that any definition of poetry which should be so framed as to exclude *Peer Gynt* must have something of what Petersen himself called "tankesvindel" about it.

Ibsen's burst of indignation relieved his mind, and three weeks later we find him writing, half apologetically, of the "cargo of nonsense" he had "shipped off" to Björnson, immediately on reading Petersen's review. He even sends a friendly "greeting" to the offending critic. But this is his last (published) letter to Björnson for something like fifteen years. How far the reception of *Peer Gynt* may have contributed to the breach between them, I do not know. Björnson's own criticism of the poem, as we shall presently see, was very favourable.

Peer Gynt was not, on its appearance, quite so popular as *Brand*. A second edition was called for in a fortnight; but the third edition did not appear until 1874, by which time the seventh edition of *Brand* was already on the market. Before the end of the century ten editions of *Peer Gynt* had appeared in Copenhagen as against fourteen of *Brand*. The first German translation appeared in 1881, and the present English translation in 1892. A French translation, by Count Prozor, appeared in the *Nouvelle Revue* in 1896.

After a great deal of discussion as to the stage-arrangement, *Peer Gynt*, largely abbreviated, was produced, with Edvard Grieg's now famous incidental music, at the Christiania Theatre in February, 1876, Henrik Klausen playing the title-part. It was acted thirty-seven times; but a fire which destroyed some of the scenery put a stop to the performances. In 1892, at the same theatre,

the first three acts were revived, with Björn Björnson as Peer, and repeated fifty times. In the repertory of the National Theatre, too (opened in 1899), *Peer Gynt* has taken a prominent place. It was first given in 1902, and was performed eighty-four times in the subsequent four years. In the version which has established itself on the Norwegian stage, all five acts are given, but the fourth and fifth acts are greatly abbreviated. In the season of 1886 the play was produced at the Dagmar Theatre, Copenhagen. August Lindberg's Swedish Company acted it in Gothenburg in 1892, in Stockholm in 1895, and afterwards toured with it in Norway and Sweden. Count Prozor's translation was acted by "L'Œuvre" at the Nouveau Théâtre, Paris, in November, 1896, of which remarkable production a lively account may be found in Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, Vol. II, p. 95. At the Deutsches Volkstheater in Vienna, in May 1902, two performances of *Peer Gynt* were given by the "Akademisch-Litterarische Verein"; and the play has since been produced in Berlin and other German cities. The first production in the English language took place at the Grand Opera House, Chicago, on October 29, 1906, when Mr. Richard Mansfield appeared as Peer Gynt. Mr. Mansfield would seem to have presented portions, at any rate, of all the principal scenes in the play, with the exception of the Sæter-Girl scene and the madhouse scene.

We have seen that the name, Peer Gynt, was suggested to Ibsen by a folk-tale in Asbjörnsen and Moe's invaluable collection. It is one of a group of tales entitled

Reindeer-Hunting in the Rondë Hills;[1] and in the same group occurs the adventure of Gudbrand Glesnë on the Gendin-Edge, which Peer Gynt works up so unblushingly in Act I., Sc. 1. The text of both these tales will be found in the Appendix, and the reader will recognise how very slight are the hints which set the poet's imagination to work. The encounter with the Sæter-Girls (Act II., Sc. 3), and the struggle with the Boyg (Act II., Sc. 7), are foreshadowed in Asbjörnsen, and the concluding remark of Anders Ulsvolden evidently suggested to Ibsen the idea of incarnating Fantasy in Peer Gynt, as in Brand he had given us incarnate Will. But the Peer Gynt of the drama has really nothing in common with the Peer Gynt of the story, and the rest of the characters are not even remotely suggested. Many scattered traits and allusions, however, are borrowed from other legends in the same storehouse of grotesque and marvellous imaginings. Thus the story of the devil in a nutshell (Act I., Sc. 3) figures in Asbjörnsen under the title of *The Boy and the Devil.*[2] The appearance of the Green-Clad One with her Ugly Brat, who offers Peer Gynt a goblet of beer (Act III., Sc. 3), is obviously suggested by an incident in *Berthe Tuppenhaug's Stories.*[3] Old Berthe, too, supplies the idea of correcting Peer Gynt's eyesight according to the standard of the hill-trolls (Act II., Sc. 6), as well as the germ of the fantastic thread-ball episode in the last Act (Sc. 6). The castle, "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" (Act III., Sc. 4), gives its title to one of Asbjörn-

[1] *Norske Huldre-Eventyr og Folkesagn,* Christiania, 1848, p. 47. See also Copenhagen edition, 1896, p. 163.

[2] *Norske Folke-og Huldre-Eventyr,* Copenhagen, 1896, p. 48.

[3] *Ibid.,* p. 129.

sen's stories,[1] which may be read in English in Mr. Andrew Lang's *Blue Fairy Book;* and *Soria Moria Castle* is the title of another legend.[2] Herr Passarge (in his *Henrik Ibsen*, Leipzig, 1883) goes so far as to trace the idea of Peer Gynt's shrinking from the casting-ladle, even though hell be the alternative (Act V., Sc. 7, etc.), to Asbjornsen's story of *The Smith whom they dared not let into Hell;*[3] but the circumstances are so different, and Ibsen's idea is such an inseparable part of the ethical scheme of the drama, that we can scarcely take it to have been suggested by this (or any other) individual story.[4] At the same time there is no doubt that *The Folk-Lore of Peer Gynt* might form the subject of a much more extended study than our space or our knowledge admits of.[5] The whole atmosphere of the first three acts and of the fifth is that of the Norwegian Folk and Fairy Tales. It must be remembered, too, that in the early 'sixties Ibsen was commissioned by the Norwegian Government to visit Romsdal and Söndmöre for the purpose of collecting folk-songs and legends. To these journeys, no doubt, we

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 259.

[2] Not included in the Copenhagen edition. See edition, Christiania, 1866, p. 115. See also Sir George Webbe Dasent's *Popular Tales from the Norse*, Edinburgh, 1859; new ed. 1903, p. 396. More or less representative selections from the storehouse of Asbjörnsen and Moe may also be found in *Tales from the Fjeld*, by G. W. Dasent, London, 1874, and in *Round the Yule Log*, by H. L. Brækstad, London, 1881.

[3] Copenhagen ed. 1896, p. 148.

[4] In this story, however, he probably found the suggestion of the "cross-roads" which figure so largely in the Fifth Act. In Asbjörnsen, they are explicitly stated to be the point where the ways to Heaven and Hell diverge.

[5] Further gleanings of legendary lore concerning Peer Gynt may be found in the Norwegian periodical *Syn og Segn*, 1903, pp. 119–130.

are mainly indebted for the local colour of *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*.

Among the sources of *Peer Gynt* must also be reckoned an "apocalyptic comedy," named *A Soul after Death*, by the Danish poet and critic J. L. Heiberg, whom Ibsen never ceased to admire, in spite of his harsh criticism of *The Vikings*. It is especially in the last scenes of the last act that the influence of Heiberg's fantasy is apparent; but traces of the Heiberg manner may also be noted in many other scenes.

In the second volume of Ibsen's *Literary Remains*, we find over thirty pages of rejected scraps and parings from *Peer Gynt;* but they contain nothing of very great interest —nothing, certainly, that the poet did wrong to reject. Almost all the fragments, indeed, are actually included in the definitive text, in a polished and perfected form. The only important exception is a whole scene which was apparently to have followed the existing second scene of the Second Act, but has entirely disappeared from the finished play. In it Peer Gynt is playing with the idea of

The writer, Per Aasmundstad, is of opinion that Peer Gynt's real name was Peer Haagaa (the owner of Haagaa farm) and that Gynt was either a name given him by the huldra-folk, or else a local nickname for humourists of his kind. According to this authority, he probably lived as far back as the seventeenth century. Per Aasmundstad's article is written in the local dialect, with such ruthless phonetic accuracy that I read it with difficulty; but he does not seem to have discovered anything that has a definite bearing on Ibsen's work. From the wording of Ibsen's letters to Hegel, however (p. viii), it would seem that he had some knowledge of the Gynt legend over and above what was to be found in Asbjörnsen. (For access to *Syn og Segn*, and for other obliging assistance, I am indebted to Herr Halvdan Koht, the author of the excellent biographical introduction to Ibsen's Letters.)

suicide, when Solveig comes upon him. He reproaches her with having driven him mad by refusing to dance with him; and she is, as she was at the wedding feast, half attracted and half frightened by his wild conduct. Then her father and mother, with Åse, come upon the scene, and the father says that Peer may have Solveig, on one condition: namely, that he shall give himself up to justice and undergo the seven years' imprisonment which is the punishment for his crime.[1] "Raise in your heart the Lord's tabernacle," says the old man, "and serve seven years as Jacob served for Rachel." "Seven years is too long," says Åse; "Eternity is longer," replies the old man —and there the fragment ends. There is nothing of much value in the omitted scene. The passage between Peer and Solveig is little more than a repetition of their encounter in the First Act; and the thrilling poetry of Solveig's appearance in Act III., Sc. 3 would have been sadly discounted if this scene had been suffered to stand.

The publication of the fragment known as the "epic *Brand*" shows us that the incident of the lad who cuts off his finger to escape military service (Act III., Sc. 1) was at first intended to figure in that poem. Brand relates how he saw the youth mutilate himself, and was present next day when the recruiting-commissioners overwhelmed him with scorn, and he fled, an outcast, to his home among the mountains. Here the youth is introduced with unmixed contempt, to typify Norway pleading weakness as a reason for not taking up arms in defence of Denmark.

[1] It is perhaps worth noting that this idea of expiating crime by undergoing the legal punishment reappears in *A Doll's House*, where Helmer says that Krogstad could have retrieved his character had he taken that manly course.

The deeper significance which is given to his case in the Pastor's address (Act V., Sc. 3) was evidently an afterthought.

What are we to say now of the drift, the interpretation of *Peer Gynt?* The first and most essential thing may be said in Ibsen's own words. On February 24, 1868, he wrote from Rome to Frederik Hegel: "I learn that the book has created much excitement in Norway. This does not trouble me in the least; but both there and in Denmark they have discovered much more satire in it than was intended by me. Why can they not read the book as a poem? For as such I wrote it. The satirical passages are tolerably isolated. But if the Norwegians of the present time recognise themselves, as it would appear they do, in the character of Peer Gynt, that is the good people's own affair." In the last sentence the innocence of intention is, no doubt, a little overdone; but there is still less doubt that Ibsen was absolutely sincere in declaring that he wrote it primarily as a poem, a work of pure imagination, and that as a work of pure imagination it ought primarily to be read. There is undeniably an under-current of ethical and satirical meaning in the play; but no one can properly enjoy or value it who is not swept along irresistibly by the surface stream of purely poetic invention and delineation. Peer himself is a character-creation on the heroic scale, as vital a personality as Falstaff or Don Quixote. It is here that the poem (as Clemens Petersen vaguely discerned) has a marked advantage over its predecessor. In spite of the tremendous energy with which he is depicted, Brand remains an

abstraction or an attitude, rather than a human being. But Peer Gynt is human in every fibre—too human to be alien to any one of us. We know him, we understand him, we love him—for who does not love a genial, imaginative, philosophic rascal? As for his adventures and vicissitudes, if they do not give us pleasure in and for themselves, quite apart from any symbolic sub-intention —just as the adventures of Sindbad, or Gil Blas, or Tom Jones, or Huckleberry Finn give us pleasure—then assuredly the poem does not affect us as Ibsen intended that it should. Readers who approach it for the first time may therefore be counselled to pay no heed to its ethical or political meanings, and to take it as it comes, simply as a dramatic romance or phantasmagoria of purely human humour and pathos. Reading it in this way, they will naturally find a good deal that seems obscure and arbitrary; but much of this will be cleared up on a second reading, by the aid of such side-lights as this Introduction can afford. No assiduity of study, however, can find in *Peer Gynt* a clear, consistent, cut-and-dried allegory, with a place for everything and everything in its place. It is not an allegory, but (as aforesaid) a phantasmagory. This is what the early critics did not realise. They quarrelled with it for the very luxuriance of its invention, the buoyant irrepressible whimsicality of its humour, the shimmering iridescence of its style. They stood before an "undulant and diverse" carnival-pageant, and grumbled because it would not fit into any recognised form, sanctioned by their preconceived æsthetic principles.

I am far from maintaining that the reckless, elusive capriciousness of the poem is an unmixed merit. It would

probably have done no harm if, after the first rapture of composition had died away, Ibsen had gone over it and pruned it a little here and there. I can by no means endorse the critics' sweeping condemnation of the Fourth Act, which contains some of the most delightful passages in the whole poem; but the first scene of this Act is unquestionably shallow in conception and diffuse in style—a piece of satiric journalism rather than of literature. The concluding scenes of the last Act, too, would certainly have been none the worse for a little compression. The auction scene (Act V., Sc. 4), though it has a sort of fantastic impressiveness, seems to me hopelessly baffling in its relation both to the outward story and to the inner significance of the poem. Here, and perhaps at some half-dozen other points, one may admit that Ibsen appears to have let his fancy run away with him; but the inert, excessive, or utterly enigmatic passages in *Peer Gynt* are surely few and brief in comparison with the passages in *Faust* to which the same epithets may be applied. On the other hand, the scenes of poignant and thrilling and haunting poetry are too many to be severally indicated. The First Act, with its inimitable life and movement, Åse's death-scene, and the Pastor's speech in the last Act, are usually cited as the culminating points of the poem; and there can be no doubt that Åse's death-scene, at any rate, is one of the supreme achievements of modern drama.[1] But there are several other scenes that I would place scarcely, if at all, lower than these. In point of weird intensity, there is nothing in the poem more marvellous

[1] It is pretty clear that the poet designed Åse's death as a deliberate contrast to the death of Brand's mother.

than the Sæter-Girl scene (Act II., Sc. 3); in point of lyric movement, Peer Gynt's repudiation of Ingrid (Act II., Sc. 1) is incomparable; and in point of sheer beauty and pathos, Solveig's arrival at the hut (Act III., Sc. 3), with the whole of the scene that follows, stands supreme.[1] For my own part, I reckon the shipwreck scenes at the beginning of the Fifth Act among the most impressive, as they are certainly not the least characteristic, in the poem. And, in enumerating its traits of undeniable greatness, one must by no means forget the character of Åse, on which Ibsen himself dwelt with justified complacency. There is not a more lifelike creation in the whole range of drama.

Having now warned the reader against allowing the search for symbolic or satiric meanings to impair his enjoyment of the pure poetry of *Peer Gynt*, I may proceed to point out some of the implications which do indubitably underlie the surface aspects of the poem. These meanings fall under three heads. First, we have universal-human satire and symbolism, bearing upon human nature in general, irrespective of race or nationality. Next we have satire upon Norwegian human nature in particular, upon the religious and political life of Norway as a nation. Lastly, we find a certain number of local and ephemeral references—what, in the slang of our stage, are called "topical allusions."

In order to provide the reader with a clue to the complex meanings of *Peer Gynt*, on its higher lines or planes

[1] In all these remarks I have in mind, of course, the scenes in their original form. The reader will easily understand the loss which they inevitably suffer in being deprived of the crowning grace of richly-elaborated rhyme.

of significance, I cannot do better than quote some paragraphs from the admirable summary of the drama given by Mr. P. H. Wicksteed in his *Four Lectures on Henrik Ibsen*.[1] Mr. Wicksteed is in such perfect sympathy with Ibsen in the stage of his development marked by *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, that he has understood these poems, in my judgment, at least as well as any other commentator, whether German or Scandinavian. He writes as follows:

"In *Brand* the hero is an embodied protest against the poverty of spirit and half-heartedness that Ibsen rebelled against in his countrymen. In *Peer Gynt* the hero is himself the embodiment of that spirit. In *Brand* the fundamental antithesis, upon which, as its central theme, the drama is constructed, is the contrast between the spirit of compromise on the one hand, and the motto 'everything or nothing' on the other. And Peer Gynt is the very incarnation of a compromising dread of decisive committal to any one course. In *Brand* the problem of self-realisation and the relation of the individual to his surroundings is obscurely struggling for recognition, and in *Peer Gynt* it becomes the formal theme upon which all the fantastic variations of the drama are built up. In both plays alike the problems of heredity and the influence of early surroundings are more than touched upon; and both alike culminate in the doctrine that the only redeeming power on earth or in heaven is the power of love.

"Peer Gynt, as already stated, stands for the Norwegian people, much as they are sketched in *Brand*, though with more brightness of colouring. Hence his

[1] London: Sonnenschein, 1892.

perpetual 'hedging' and determination never so to commit himself that he cannot draw back. Hence his fragmentary life of smatterings. Hence his perpetual brooding over the former grandeur of his family, his idle dreams of the future, and his neglect of every present duty. Hence his deep-rooted selfishness and cynical indifference to all higher motives; and hence, above all, his sordid and superstitious religion; for to him religion is the apotheosis of the art of 'hedging.'

"But Ibsen's allegories are never stiffly or pedantically worked out. His characters, though typical, are personal. We could read *Brand*, and could feel the tragedy and learn the lessons of the drama without any knowledge whatever of the circumstances or feelings under which it was written, or the references to the Norwegian character and conduct with which it teems.

"So, too, with *Peer Gynt*. We may forget the national significance of the sketch, except where special allusions recall it to our minds, and may think only of the universal problems with which the poem deals, and which will retain their awful interest when Ibsen's polemic against his countrymen has sunk into oblivion. The study of *Peer Gynt* as an occasional poem should be strictly subsidiary and introductory to its study as the tragedy of a lost soul.

"What is it to be one's self? God *meant something* when he made each one of us. For a man to embody that meaning of God in his words and deeds, and so become in his degree a 'word of God made flesh,' is to be himself. But thus to be himself he must slay himself. That is to say, he must slay the craving to make himself the centre

round which others revolve, and must strive to find his true orbit and swing, self-poised, round the great central light. But what if a poor devil can never puzzle out what on earth God *did* mean when he made him? Why, then, he must *feel* it. But how often your 'feeling' misses fire! Ay! there you have it. The devil has no stauncher ally than *want of perception!* [Act V., Sc. 9.]

"But, after all, you may generally find out what God meant you for, if you will face facts. It is easy to find a refuge from facts in lies, in self-deception, and in self-sufficiency. It is easy to take credit to yourself for what circumstances have done for you, and lay upon circumstances what you owe to yourself. It is easy to think you are realising yourself by refusing to become a 'pack-horse for the weal and woe of others' [Act IV., Sc. 1], keeping alternatives open and never closing a door behind you or burning your ships, and so always remaining the master of the situation and self-possessed. If you choose to do these easy things you may always 'get round,' your difficulties [Act II., Sc. 7], but you will never get through them. You will remain master of the situation indeed, but the situation will become poorer and narrower every day. If you never commit yourself, you never express yourself, and your self becomes less and less significant and decisive. Calculating selfishness is the annihilation of self."

So far Mr. Wicksteed. The general significance of the poem, in the terms of that theism which may or may not have been Ibsen's personal creed during the years of its incubation, could scarcely be better expounded,

When we come to subsidiary meanings, we must proceed more carefully, for we have the poet's own word for it that many have been read into the poem whereof he never dreamt. For example, in his first letter to Björnson after reading Clemens Petersen's criticism, he protested against that critic's assumption that the Strange Passenger (Act V., Scs. 1 and 2) was symbolic of "dread." "If my head had been on the block," he said, "and such an explanation would have saved my life, it would never have occurred to me. I never thought of such a thing. I stuck in the scene as a mere caprice." For this element of caprice we must always allow. The whole Fourth Act, the poet told the present writer, was an afterthought, and did not belong to the original scheme of the play.

Here we come upon the question whether Ibsen consciously designed *Peer Gynt* as a counterblast to Björnson's idyllic peasant-novel, *Synnöve Solbakken*. This theory, put forward by a judicious French critic, M. Auguste Ehrhard,[1] among others, has always seemed to me very far-fetched; but as Dr. Brandes, in the Introduction to *Peer Gynt* in the German collected edition, appears to give it his sanction, I quote what he says on the point: "German critics have laid special emphasis on the fact that Ibsen here placed himself in conscious opposition to Björnson's glorification, in his early novels, of the younger generation of Norwegian peasants. Quarrelsomeness and love of fighting were represented in Thorbjörn, the hero of *Synnöve Solbakken*, as traits of the traditional old-Norse viking spirit; in *Arne* the poetic proclivities of the people were placed in an engaging light.

[1] *Henrik Ibsen et le Théâtre Contemporain.* Paris, 1892.

The vaunted fisticuff-heroism was, in Ibsen's view, nothing but rawness, and the poetic proclivities of Norwegian youth appeared to him, in the last analysis, simply a very prevalent love of lying and gasconading. The Norwegians appear in the caricaturing mirror of this brilliant poem as a people who, in smug contentment, are 'to themselves enough,' and therefore laud everything that is their own, however insignificant it may be, shrink from all decisive action, and have for their national vice a tendency to fantastication and braggadocio." That *Peer Gynt* is a counterblast to national romanticism and chauvinism in general there can of course be no doubt; but I see no reason to suppose that Ibsen had Björnson's novels specially in view, or intended anything like a "caricature" of them. It is pretty clear, too, that Björnson himself had no such idea in his mind when he reviewed the poem in the *Norsk Folkeblad* for November 23, 1867. His long article is almost entirely laudatory, and certainly shows no smallest sign of hostile party-spirit. "*Peer Gynt*," says Björnson, "is a satire upon Norwegian egoism, narrowness, and self-sufficiency, so executed as to have made me not only again and again laugh till I was sore, but again and again give thanks to the author in my heart—as I here do publicly." Beyond remarking upon the over-exuberance of detail, and criticising the versification, Björnson says little or nothing in dispraise of the poem. On the other hand he says curiously little of its individual beauties. He never mentions Åse, says nothing of her death-scene, or of the Pastor's speech, and picks out as the best thing in the play the thread-ball scene (Act V., Sc. 6).

The most obviously satirical passage of the first three

acts is the scene in the Dovrë-King's palace (Act II., Sc. 6), with its jibe at Norwegian national vanity:

> The cow gives cakes and the bullock mead
> Ask not if its taste be sour or sweet;
> The main matter is, and you mustn't forget it,
> It's all of it home-brewed.

In the original version of the scene, as it appears in the *Literary Remains*, the shafts of satire are even more clearly driven home than in the finished play. The troll-banquet begins with a chanting in unison of a parody on the Norwegian national song, "For Norway, Heroes' Motherland," to the stirring melody of which Ibsen himself, in the days of his national-romanticism, had written many a patriotic stanza. Then a "Professor-Troll," called upon to pronounce a eulogy on Trolldom, launches forth into the same speech which he has made year after year on like occasions—a habit, it is said, of Norwegian Independence Day (17th May) orators. These too obvious thrusts Ibsen removed on revision, without thereby in any degree obscuring his satiric intention. Much more difficult is the interpretation of the Boyg,[1] that vague, shapeless, ubiquitous, inevitable, invulnerable

[1] Deeming it unnecessary to trouble our readers with niceties of pronunciation, we have represented the "Böig" of the original by the more easily pronounceable "Boyg." The root-idea seems to be that of bending, of sinuousness; compare Norwegian *böie*, German *biegen*, to bend. In Aasmundstad's version of the *Peer Gynt* legends (see Note, p. 13) when the Boyg names itself, Peer answers "Ante! du æ rak hell bògjë, saa fæ du sleppe mé fram"—"Whether you are straight or crooked, you must let me pass." The German translator, both in the folk-tale and in the drama, renders "Böigen" by "der Krumme." So far as we are aware, the name occurs in no other folk-tale save that of *Peer Gynt*. It is not generic, but denotes an individual troll-monster.

Thing which Peer encounters in the following scene (Act II., Sc. 7). Ibsen found it in the folk-tale, and was attracted, no doubt, by the sheer uncanniness and eerieness of the idea. Neither can one doubt, however, that in his own mind he attributed to the monster some symbolic signification. Dr. Brandes would have us see in it the Spirit of Compromise—the same evil spirit which is assailed in *Brand*. The Swedish critic, Vasenius, interprets it as Peer Gynt's own consciousness of his inability to take a decisive step—to go through an obstacle in place of skirting round it. Herr Passarge reads in it a symbol of the mass of mankind, *perpetuum immobile*, opposing its sheer force of inertia to every forward movement.[1] This would make it nearly equivalent to "the compact majority" of *An Enemy of the People;* or, looking at it from a slightly different angle, we might see in the scene an illustration in action of that despairing cry of Schiller's Talbot: "Mit der Dummheit kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens." The truth probably is that the poet vaguely intended this vague monster to be as elusive in its symbolism as in its physical constitution. But when, in Act IV., Sc. 12, he formally identifies the Boyg with the Sphinx, we may surely conclude that one of the interpretations present to his mind was metaphysical. In this aspect, the Boyg would typify the riddle of existence, with which we grapple in vain, and which we have to "get round" as best we can.

The Fourth Act contains a good many special allusions, in addition to the general, and somewhat crude, satire

[1] Dr. A. von Hanstein (*Ibsen als Idealist*, Leipzig, 1897, p. 67) states that Ibsen himself endorsed this interpretation; but I do not know on what evidence his statement is founded.

in the opening scene on the characteristics of different nationalities, with particular reference to their conduct in the Dano-German crisis. Peer's dreams of African colonisation (Act IV., Sc. 5), and of the foundation of a new state to be called Gyntiana, refer to an attempt made by Ole Bull, between 1852 and 1857, to found, in the State of Pennsylvania, an ideal commonwealth, which was to have been christened "Oleana." The attempt and its failure attracted a good deal of attention in Norway, and were clearly remembered when *Peer Gynt* was written, some ten years later. But it is especially in the madhouse scene (Act IV., Sc. 13) that satiric sallies abound. "The Fellah with the royal mummy on his back," says Henrik Jæger,[1] "is—like Trumpeterstråle—a cut at the Swedes, the mummy being Charles the Twelfth. Like the Fellah, it is implied, the Swedes are extremely proud of their 'Hero-king,' and yet during the Dano-German war they showed not the smallest sign of having anything in common with him, unless it were that they, like him, 'kept still and completely dead.' In the delusion of the minister Hussein, who imagines himself a pen, there is a general reference to the futile address- and note-mongering which went on in Norwegian-Swedish officialdom during the Dano-German War, and a more special one to an eminent Swedish statesman [Grev Manderström],[2] who, during the war, had been extremely

[1] *Henrik Ibsen*, 1828–1888. *Et Literært Livsbillede*, Copenhagen, 1888. English Translation, London, Heinemann, 1890.

[2] A writer in the Danish *Dagblad* for December 15, 1863, said of Manderström: "Many people have imagined they saw in him a new Oxenstjerna, a Northern Cavour. It remains to be seen whether he is a real statesman or only an adroit pen."

proud of his official notes, and had imagined that by means of them he might exercise a decisive influence on the course of events."

Most prominent and unmistakable of all the satiric passages, however, is the attack on the language-reformers in the personage of Huhu. In the list of characters, Huhu is set down as a "Målstræver from Zanzibar." Now the Malstrævers are a party which desires to substitute a language compounded from the various local dialects for the Norwegian of the townsfolk and of literature. This they call Danish, and declare to be practically a foreign tongue to the peasants, who form the backbone of the Norwegian nation. Ibsen's satire, it must be said, has had little or no effect on the movement, which has gone on slowly but steadily, and has of late years met with official and legislative recognition. There is a large and increasing literature in the "Mål"; it is taught in schools and it is spoken in the Storthing. Where the movement may end it is hard to say. It must seem to a foreigner, as it seemed to Ibsen, retrograde and obscurantist; but there is doubtless some genuine impulse behind it which the foreigner cannot appreciate.

The principles which have guided us in the following transcript demand a few words of explanation. *Peer Gynt* is written from first to last in rhymed verse. Six or eight different measures are employed in the various scenes, and the rhymes are exceedingly rich and complex. The frequency of final light syllables in Norwegian implies an exceptional abundance of double rhymes, and Ibsen has taken full advantage of this peculiarity. In the short

first scene of the Second Act, for example, twenty-five out of the forty lines end in double rhymes, and there are three double-rhymed triplets. The tintinnabulation of these double rhymes, then, gives to most of the scenes a metrical character which it might have puzzled even Swinburne to reproduce in English. Moreover, the ordinary objections to rhymed translations seemed to apply with exceptional force in the case of *Peer Gynt*. The characteristic quality of its style is its vernacular ease and simplicity. It would have been heart-breaking work (apart from its extreme difficulty) to substitute for this racy terseness the conventional graces of English poetic diction, padding here and perverting there. To a prose translation, on the other hand, the objections seemed even greater. It is possible to give in prose some faint adumbration of epic dignity; but we had here no epic to deal with. We found (though the statement may at first seem paradoxical) that the same vernacular simplicity of style which forbade a translation in rhyme, was no less hostile to a translation in prose. The characteristic quality of the poet's achievement lay precisely in his having, by the aid of rhythm and rhyme, transfigured the most easy and natural dialogue, without the least sacrifice of its naturalness. Entirely to eliminate these graces of form would have been to reduce the poem to prose indeed. It seemed little better than casting a silver statue into the crucible and asking the world to divine from the ingot something of the sculptor's power. A prose translation, in short, could not but strip Fantasy of its pinions, rob Satire of its barbs. The poet himself, moreover, expressly declared that he would rather let *Peer Gynt* remain untranslated

than see it rendered in prose. After a good deal of reflection and experiment, we finally suggested to him a middle course between prose and rhyme: a translation as nearly as possible in the metres of the original, but with the rhymes suppressed. To this compromise he assented, and the following pages are the result.

We had no precedent—within our knowledge, at any rate—to guide us, and were forced to lay down our own laws. Even at the risk of falling between two stools, we proposed to ourselves a dual purpose. We sought to produce a translation which should convey to the general reader some faint conception of the movement and colour, the wit and pathos, of the original, and at the same time a transcript which should serve the student as a "crib" to the Norwegian text. This, then, the reader must be good enough to bear in mind: that the following version is designed to facilitate, not to supersede, the study of the original. But, apart from our desire to provide a "crib" to *Peer Gynt*, we felt that, in taking the liberty of suppressing the rhymes, we abjured our right to any other liberty whatsoever. A rhymed paraphrase of a great poem may have a beauty of its own; an unrhymed version must be no paraphrase, but a faithful transcript, else "the ripple of laughing rhyme" has been sacrificed in vain. Our fundamental principle, then, has been to represent the original *line for line;* and to this principle we have adhered with the utmost fidelity. There are probably not fifty cases in the whole poem in which a word has been transferred from one line to another, and then only some pronoun or auxiliary verb. It is needless to say that in adhering to this principle we have often had to resist

temptation. Many cases presented themselves in which greater clearness, grace, and vigour might easily have been attained by transferring a word or phrase from this line to that, or even altering the sequence of a whole group of lines. In no case have we yielded to such temptation, feeling that, our rule once relaxed, we should insensibly but inevitably lapse into mere paraphrase. Temptation beset us with especial force in the less vital passages of the poem. In these places it would have been easy to give our rendering some approach to grace and point by disregarding inversions and other defects of expression, justified in the original by the wit and spirit of the rhymes, but of course deprived in our transcript of any such excuse. Here, as elsewhere, we were proof against temptation; it is for our readers to decide whether our constancy was heroic or pedantic.

It would be folly to pretend either that we have reproduced every word of the original, or that we have avoided all necessity for "padding." The chief drawback of our line-for-line principle is that it has debarred us from eking out the deficiency of one line with the superfluity of the next. We trust, however, that few essential ideas, or even words, of the original will be found quite unaccounted for; while with regard to padding, we have tried, where we found it absolutely forced upon us, to use only such mechanical parts of speech as introduced no new idea into the context. We have found by experiment that the fact of writing in measure has frequently enabled us to keep much closer to the original than would have been possible in prose. This is not in reality so strange as it may at first sight appear. A prose translation of verse

can avoid paraphrase only at the cost of grotesque inelegance; whereas in rendering metre into metre, we are working under the same laws which govern the original, and are therefore enabled in many cases to adopt identical forms of expression, which would be quite inadmissible in prose.

Thirty out of the thirty-eight scenes into which the five acts are divided are written almost entirely in an irregular measure of four accents, evidently designed to give the greatest possible variety and suppleness to the dialogue. The four accents constitute almost the only assignable law of this measure, the feet being of any length, from two to four syllables, and of all possible denominations—iambics, trochees, dactyls, anapæsts, amphibrachs. The effect is at first rather baffling to the unaccustomed ear; but when one gets into the swing of the rub-a-dub rhythm, if we may venture to call it so, the feeling of ruggedness vanishes, and the verse is found to be capable of poignantly pathetic, as well as of buoyantly humorous, expression.

We have not attempted to reproduce each line of this measure accurately, foot for foot, holding it enough to observe the law of the four accents. Where the four-accent rule is obviously departed from, it will generally be found to be in obedience to the original; for Ibsen now and then (but very rarely) introduces a line or couplet of three or of five accents.

Of the eight scenes in which this measure is not employed, three—Act I., Sc. 1, Act II., Sc. 1, and Act. IV., Sc. 7—are in a perfectly regular trochaic measure of four accents, the lines containing seven or eight syllables, ac-

cording as the rhymes are single or double. In dealing with this measure, we have not thought it necessary to follow the precise arrangement of the original in the alternation of seven and eight syllable lines. In other words, we have sometimes represented a seven-syllable line by one of eight syllables, an eight-syllable line by one of seven. In the short first scene of the Second Art, however, every line represents accurately the length of the corresponding line in the original.

The fourth scene of Act II. is written in lines of three accents; the last scene of the Third Act—Åse's death-scene—in lines of three accents with alternate double and single rhymes. In rendering this scene, we have been careful to preserve the alternation of strong with light endings, which gives it its metrical character.

Two scenes—Act IV., Sc. 1, and Act V., Sc. 2—consist of four-accent iambic lines, differing from the octosyllabic verse of *Marmion* or *The Giaour* chiefly in the greater prevalence of double and even treble rhymes. Finally, the sixth scene of Act V. consists mainly of eight-line lyrical stanzas, with two accents in each line, Peer Gynt's interspersed remarks being in trochaic verses, like those of Act I., Sc. 1. In such intercalated passages, so to speak, as the rhapsodies of Huhu and the Fellah in Act IV., Sc. 13, and the Pastor's speech at the grave in Act V., Sc. 3, we have accurately reproduced the measures of the original. The Pastor's speech is the only passage in the whole poem which is couched in iambic decasyllables.

In dealing with idioms and proverbial expressions, our practice has not been very consistent. We have

sometimes, where they seemed peculiarly racy and expressive, translated them literally; in other cases we have had recourse to the nearest English equivalent, even where the metaphor employed is quite different. In the latter instances we have usually given the literal rendering of the phrase in a footnote.

For the present edition the text has been carefully revised, and some rough edges have, it is hoped, been smoothed away; but no very essential alteration has been made. While we are keenly conscious of all that the poem loses in our rendering, we cannot but feel that it has justified its existence, inasmuch as it has brought home to thousands of readers on both sides of the Atlantic a not wholly inadequate sense of the greatness of the original.

W. A.

PEER GYNT

(1867)

CHARACTERS

Åse,[1] *a peasant's widow.*
Peer Gynt,[2] *her son.*
Two Old Women *with corn-sacks.* Aslak, *a smith.* Wedding Guests. A Kitchen-Master, A Fiddler, etc.
A Man and Wife, *newcomers to the district.*
Solveig and Little Helga, *their daughters.*
The Farmer at Hegstad.
Ingrid, *his daughter.*
The Bridegroom and His Parents.
Three Sæter-Girls. A Green-Clad Woman.
The Old Man of the Dovrë.
A Troll-Courtier. Several Others. Troll-Maidens and Troll-Urchins. A Couple of Witches. Brownies, Nixies, Gnomes, etc.
An Ugly Brat. A Voice in the Darkness. Bird-Cries.
Kari, *a cottar's wife.*
Master Cotton, Monsieur Ballon, Herren von Eberkopf and Trumpeterstråle, *gentlemen on their travels.* A Thief and A Receiver.
Anitra, *daughter of a Bedouin chief.*
Arabs, Female Slaves, Dancing-Girls, etc.
The Memnon-Statue (*singing*). The Sphinx at Gizeh (*muta persona*).
Professor Begriffenfeldt, Dr. phil., *director of the madhouse at Cairo.*
Huhu, *a language-reformer from the coast of Malabar.* Hussein, *an Eastern Minister.* A Fellah, *with a royal mummy.*
Several Madmen, with their Keepers.
A Norwegian Skipper and His Crew. A Strange Passenger.
A Pastor. A Funeral-Party. A Parish-Officer. A Button-Moulder. A Lean Person.

(*The action, which opens in the beginning of the present* [*that is the nineteenth*] *century, and ends towards our own days* [1867], *takes place partly in Gudbrandsdale, and on the mountains around it, partly on the coast of Morocco, in the desert of Sahara, in a madhouse at Cairo, at sea, etc.*)

[1] Prounce *Oasë.* The letter å is pronounced like the *o* in "home."
[2] Pronounce *Pair Günt*—the *G* hard, the *y* like the German modified *ü.*

PEER GYNT

ACT FIRST

SCENE FIRST

A wooded hillside near Åse's *farm. A river rushes down the slope. On the further side of it an old mill-shed. It is a hot day in summer.*

Peer Gynt, *a strongly-built youth of twenty, comes down the pathway. His mother,* Åse, *a small, slightly-built woman, follows him, scolding angrily.*

Åse.

Peer, you're lying!

Peer.

[*Without stopping.*]

No, I am not!

Åse.

Well then, swear that it is true!

Peer.

Swear? Why should I?

Åse.

See, you dare not!
It's a lie from first to last.

PEER.

[*Stopping.*]

It is true—each blessed word!

ÅSE.

[*Confronting him.*]

Don't you blush before your mother?
First you skulk among the mountains
Monthlong in the busiest season,
Stalking reindeer in the snows;
Home you come then, torn and tattered,
Gun amissing, likewise game;—
And at last, with open eyes,
Think to get me to believe
All the wildest hunters'-lies!—
Well, where did you find the buck, then?

PEER.

West near Gendin.[1]

ÅSE.

[*Laughing scornfully.*]

Ah! Indeed.

PEER.

Keen the blast towards me swept;
Hidden by an alder-clump,
He was scraping in the snow-crust
After lichen——

ÅSE.

[*As before.*]

Doubtless, yes!

[1] Pronounce *Yendeen.*

PEER.

Breathlessly I stood and listened,
Heard the crunching of his hoof,
Saw the branches of one antler.
Softly then among the boulders
I crept forward on my belly.
Crouched in the moraine I peered up;—
Such a buck, so sleek and fat,
You, I'm sure, have ne'er set eyes on.

ÅSE.

No, of course not!

PEER.

Bang! I fired.
Clean he dropped upon the hillside.
But the instant that he fell,
I sat firm astride his back,
Gripped him by the left ear tightly,
And had almost sunk my knife-blade
In his neck, behind his skull—
When, behold! the brute screamed wildly,
Sprang upon his feet like lightning,
With a back-cast of his head
From my fist made knife and sheath fly
Pinned me tightly by the thigh,
Jammed his horns against my legs,
Clenched me like a pair of tongs;—
Then forthwith away he flew
Right along the Gendin-Edge!

ÅSE.

[*Involuntarily.*]

Jesus save us——!

PEER.

Have you ever
Chanced to see the Gendin-Edge?
Nigh on four miles long it stretches
Sharp before you like a scythe.
Down o'er glaciers, landslips, screes,
Down the toppling grey moraines,
You can see, both right and left,
Straight into the tarns that slumber,
Black and sluggish, more than seven
Hundred fathoms deep below you.
Right along the Edge we two
Clove our passage through the air.
Never rode I such a colt!
Straight before us as we rushed
'Twas as though there glittered suns.
Brown-backed eagles that were sailing
In the wide and dizzy void
Half-way 'twixt us and the tarns,
Dropped behind, like motes in air.
On the shores crashed hurtling ice-floes,
But no echo reached my ears.
Only sprites of dizziness[1] sprang,
Dancing, round;—they sang, they swung,
Circle-wise, past sight and hearing!

ÅSE.

[*Dizzy.*]

Oh, God save me!

[1] This is the poet's own explanation of this difficult passage. "Hvirvlens vætter," he writes, is equivalent to "Svimmelhedens ånder"—*i. e.*, spirits of dizziness or vertigo.

PEER.

All at once,
At a desperate, break-neck spot,
Rose a great cock-ptarmigan,
Flapping, cackling, terrified,
From the crack where he lay hidden
At the buck's feet on the Edge.
Then the buck shied half around,
Leapt sky-high, and down we plunged,
Both of us, into the depths!

[ÅSE *totters, and catches at the trunk of a tree.* PEER GYNT *continues:*

Mountain walls behind us, black,
And below a void unfathomed!
First we clove through banks of mist,
Then we clove a flock of sea-gulls,
So that they, in mid-air startled,
Flew in all directions, screaming.
Downward rushed we, ever downward.
But beneath us something shimmered,
Whitish, like a reindeer's belly.—
Mother, 'twas our own reflection
In the glass-smooth mountain tarn,
Shooting up towards the surface
With the same wild rush of speed
Wherewith we were shooting downwards.

ÅSE.

[*Gasping for breath.*]

Peer! God help me——! Quickly, tell——

PEER.

Buck from over, buck from under,
In a moment clashed together,

Scattering foam-flecks all around.
There we lay then, floating, plashing,—
But at last we made our way
Somehow to the northern shore;
Swam the buck, I clung behind him;—
I ran homewards——

ÅSE.

But the buck, dear?

PEER.

He's there still, for aught I know;—
[*Snaps his fingers, turns on his heel, and adds:*
Catch him, and you're welcome to him!

ÅSE.

And your neck you haven't broken?
Haven't broken both your thighs?
And your backbone, too, is whole?
Oh, dear Lord—what thanks, what praise,
Should be thine who helped my boy!
There's a rent, though, in your breeches;
But it's scarce worth talking of
When one thinks what dreadful things
Might have come of such a leap——!
[*Stops suddenly, looks at him open-mouthed and wide-eyed; cannot find words for some time, but at last bursts out:*
Oh, you devil's story-teller,
Cross of Christ, how you can lie!
All this screed you foist upon me,
I remember now, I knew it
When I was a girl of twenty.

Gudbrand Glesnë[1] it befell,
Never you, you——

PEER.

Mé as well.
Such a thing can happen twice.

ÅSE.

[*Exasperated.*]

Yes, a lie, turned topsy-turvy,
Can be prinked and tinselled out,
Decked in plumage new and fine,
Till none knows its lean old carcass.
That is just what you've been doing,
Vamping up things, wild and grand,
Garnishing with eagles' backs
And with all the other horrors,
Lying right and lying left,
Filling me with speechless dread,
Till at last I recognised not
What of old I'd heard and known!

PEER.

If another talked like that
I'd half kill him for his pains.

ÅSE.

[*Weeping.*]

Oh, would God I lay a corpse;
Would the black earth held me sleeping.
Prayers and tears don't bite upon him.—
Peer, you're lost, and ever will be!

[1] See Appendix.

PEER.

Darling, pretty little mother,
You are right in every word;—
Don't be cross, be happy——

ÅSE.

Silence!
Could I, if I would, be happy,
With a pig like you for son?
Think how bitter I must find it,
I, a poor defenceless widow,
Ever to be put to shame! [*Weeping again.*
How much have we now remaining
From your grandsire's days of glory?
Where are now the sacks[1] of coin
Left behind by Rasmus Gynt?
Ah, your father lent them wings,—
Lavished them abroad like sand,
Buying land in every parish,
Driving round in gilded chariots.
Where is all the wealth he wasted
At the famous winter-banquet,
When each guest sent glass and bottle
Shivering 'gainst the wall behind him?

PEER.

Where's the snow of yester-year?

ÅSE.

Silence, boy, before your mother!
See the farmhouse! Every second
Window-pane is stopped with clouts.

[1] Literally, "bushels."

Hedges, fences, all are down,
Beasts exposed to wind and weather,
Fields and meadows lying fallow,
Every month a new distraint——

PEER.

Come now, stop this old-wife's talk!
Many a time has luck seemed drooping,
And sprung up as high as ever!

ÅSE.

Salt-strewn is the soil it grew from.
Lord, but you're a rare one, you,—
Just as pert and jaunty still,
Just as bold as when the Pastor,
Newly come from Copenhagen,
Bade you tell your Christian name,
And declared that such a headpiece
Many a Prince down there might envy;
Till the cob your father gave him,
With a sledge to boot, in thanks
For his pleasant, friendly talk.—
Ah, but things went bravely then!
Provost,[1] Captain, all the rest,
Dropped in daily, ate and drank,
Swilling, till they well-nigh burst.
But 'tis need that tests one's neighbour.
Lonely here it grew and, silent,
From the day that "Gold-bag Jon"[2]

[1] An ecclesiastical dignitary—something equivalent to a rural dean.

[2] "Jon med Skjæppen"—literally, "John with the Bushel"—a nickname given him in his days of prosperity, in allusion to his supposed bushels of money.

Started with his pack, a pedlar.
[*Dries her eyes with her apron.*
Ah, you're big and strong enough,
You should be a staff and pillar
For your mother's frail old age,—
You should keep the farm-work going,
Guard the remnants of your gear;— [*Crying again.*
Oh, God help me, small's the profit
You have been to me, you scamp!
Lounging by the hearth at home,
Grubbing in the charcoal embers;
Or, round all the country, frightening
Girls away from merry-makings—
Shaming me in all directions,
Fighting with the worst rapscallions——

PEER.

[*Turning away from her.*]

Let me be.

ÅSE.

[*Following him.*]

Can you deny
That you were the foremost brawler
In the mighty battle royal
Fought the other day at Lundë,
When you raged like mongrels mad?
Who was it but you that broke
Blacksmith Aslak's arm for him,—
Or at any rate that wrenched one
Of his fingers out of joint?

PEER.

Who has filled you with such prate?

ÅSE.

[*Hotly.*]

Cottar Kari heard the yells!

PEER.

[*Rubbing his elbow.*]

Maybe, but 'twas I that howled.

ÅSE.

You?

PEER.

Yes, mother,—*I* got beaten.

ÅSE.

What d'you say?

PEER.

He's limber, h e is.

ÅSE.

Who?

PEER.

Why Aslak, to be sure.

ÅSE.

Shame—and shame; I spit upon you!
Such a worthless sot as that,
Such a brawler, such a sodden
Dram-sponge to have beaten you! [*Weeping again.*
Many a shame and slight I've suffered;
But that this should come to pass

Is the worst disgrace of all.
What if he be ne'er so limber,
Need you therefore be a weakling?

PEER.

Though I hammer or am hammered,—
Still we must have lamentations. [*Laughing.*
Cheer up, mother——

ÅSE.

What? You're lying
Now again?

PEER.

Yes, just this once.
Come now, wipe your tears away;—
[*Clenching his left hand.*
See,—with this same pair of tongs,
Thus I held the smith bent double,
While my sledge-hammer right fist——

ÅSE.

Oh, you brawler! You will bring me
With your doings to the grave!

PEER.

No, you're worth a better fate;
Better twenty thousand times!
Little, ugly, dear old mother,
You may safely trust my word,—
All the parish shall exalt you;
Only wait till I have done
Something—something really grand.

ÅSE.

[*Contemptuously.*]

You!

PEER.

Who knows what may befall one.

ÅSE.

Could you but find so much sense,
One day, as to do the darning
Of your breeches for yourself!

PEER.

[*Hotly.*]

I will be a king, a kaiser!

ÅSE.

Oh, God comfort me, he's losing
All the little wits he'd left!

PEER.

Yes, I will! Just give me time!

ÅSE.

Give you time, you'll be a prince,
So the saying goes, I think.

PEER.

You shall see!

ÅSE.

Oh, hold your tongue;
You're as mad as mad can be.—

Ah, and yet it's true enough,—
S o m e t h i n g might have come of you,
Had you not been steeped for ever
In your lies and trash and moonshine.
Hegstad's girl was fond of you.
Easily you could have won her
Had you wooed her with a will——

PEER.

Could I?

ÅSE.

The old man's too feeble
Not to give his child her way.
He is stiff-necked in a fashion;
But at last 'tis Ingrid rules;
And where s h e leads, step by step
Stumps the gaffer, grumbling, after.
[*Begins to cry again.*
Ah, my Peer!—a golden girl—
Land entailed on her! Just think,
Had you set your mind upon it,
You'd be now a bridegroom brave,—
You that stand here grimed and tattered!

PEER.

[*Briskly.*]

Come, we'll go a-wooing then!

ÅSE.

Where?

PEER.

At Hegstad!

ÅSE.

Ah, poor boy;
Hegstad way is barred to wooers!

PEER.

How is that?

ÅSE.

Ah, woe is me!
Lost the moment, lost the luck——

PEER.

Speak!

ÅSE.

[*Sobbing.*]

While in the Wester-hills
You in air were riding reindeer,
Here Mads Moen's[1] won the girl!

PEER.

What! That women's-bugbear! He——

ÅSE.

Ay, she's taking him for husband.

PEER.

Wait you here till I have harnessed
Horse and wagon—— [*Going.*

ÅSE.

Spare your pains.
They are to be wed to-morrow——

[1] Pronounce *Maass Moo-en.*

PEER.

Pooh; this evening I'll be there!

ÅSE.

Fie now! Would you crown our miseries
With a load of all men's scorn?

PEER.

Never fear; 'twill all go well.
[*Shouting and laughing at the same time.*
Mother, jump! We'll spare the wagon;
'Twould take time to fetch the mare up——
[*Lifts her up in his arms.*

ÅSE.

Put me down!

PEER.

No, in my arms
I will bear you to the wedding!
[*Wades out into the stream.*

ÅSE.

Help! The Lord have mercy on us!
Peer! We're drowning——

PEER.

I was born
For a braver death——

ÅSE.

Ay, true;
Sure enough you'll hang at last! [*Tugging at his hair.*
Oh, you brute!

PEER.

Keep quiet now;
Here the bottom's slippery-slimy.

ÅSE.

Ass!

PEER.

That's right, don't spare your tongue;
That does no one any harm.
Now it's shelving up again——

ÅSE.

Don't you drop me!

PEER.

Heisan! Hop!
Now we'll play at Peer and reindeer;— [*Curvetting.*
I'm the reindeer, you are Peer!

ÅSE.

Oh, I'm going clean distraught!

PEER.

See now—we have reached the shallows;—
[*Wades ashore.*
Come, a kiss now, for the reindeer;
Just to thank him for the ride——

ÅSE.

[*Boxing his ears.*]
This is how I thank him!

PEER.

Ow!
That's a miserable fare!

ÅSE.

Put me down!

PEER.

First to the wedding.
Be my spokesman. You're so clever;
Talk to him, the old curmudgeon;
Say Mads Moen's good for nothing——

ÅSE.

Put me down!

PEER.

And tell him then
What a rare lad is Peer Gynt.

ÅSE.

Truly, you may swear to that!
Fine's the character I'll give you.
Through and through I'll show you up;
All about your devil's pranks
I will tell them straight and plain——

PEER.

Will you?

ÅSE.

[*Kicking with rage.*]

I won't stay my tongue
Till the old man sets his dog
At you, as you were a tramp!

PEER.

H'm; then I must go alone.

ÅSE.

Ay, but I'll come after you!

PEER.

Mother dear, you haven't strength——

ÅSE.

Strength? When I'm in such a rage,
I could crush the rocks to powder!
Hu! I'd make a meal of flints!
Put me down!

PEER.

You'll promise then——

ÅSE.

Nothing! I'll to Hegstad with you!
They shall know you, what you are!

PEER.

Then you'll even have to stay here.

ÅSE.

Never! To the feast I'm coming.

PEER.

That you shan't.

ÅSE.

What will you do?

PEER.

Perch you on the mill-house roof.

[*He puts her up on the roof.* ÅSE *screams.*

ÅSE.

Lift me down!

PEER.

Yes, if you'll listen——

ÅSE.

Rubbish!

PEER.

Dearest mother, pray——

ÅSE.

[*Throwing a sod of grass at him.*]

Lift me down this moment, Peer!

PEER.

If I dared, be sure I would. [*Coming nearer.*
Now remember, sit quite still,
Do not sprawl and kick about;
Do not tug and tear the shingles,—
Else 'twill be the worse for you;
You might topple down.

ÅSE.

You beast!

PEER.

Do not kick!

ÅSE.

I'd have you blown
Like a changeling, into space![1]

PEER.

Mother, fie!

ÅSE.

Bah!

PEER.

Rather give your
Blessing on my undertaking.
Will you? Eh?

ÅSE.

I'll thrash you soundly,
Hulking fellow though you be!

PEER.

Well, good-bye then, mother dear!
Patience; I'll be back ere long.
[*Is going, but turns, holds up his finger warningly, and says:*
Careful now, don't kick and sprawl! [*Goes.*

ÅSE.

Peer!—God help me, now he's off;
Reindeer-rider! Liar! Hei!

[1] It is believed in some parts of Norway that "changelings" (elf-children left in the stead of those taken away by the fairies) can, by certain spells, be made to fly away up the chimney.

Will you listen!—No, he's striding
O'er the meadow——! [*Shrieks.*] Help! I'm dizzy!

Two Old Women, *with sacks on their backs, come down the path to the mill.*

First Woman.

Christ, who's screaming?

Åse.

It is I!

Second Woman.

Åse! Well, you a r e exalted!

Åse.

This won't be the end of it;—
Soon, God help me, I'll be heaven-high!

First Woman.

Bless your passing!

Åse.

Fetch a ladder;
I must be down! That devil Peer——

Second Woman.

Peer! Your son?

Åse.

Now you can say
You have seen how he behaves.

FIRST WOMAN.

We'll bear witness.

ÅSE.

Only help me;
Straight to Hegstad will I hasten——

SECOND WOMAN.

Is he there?

FIRST WOMAN.

You'll be revenged, then;
Aslak Smith will be there too.

ÅSE.

[*Wringing her hands.*]

Oh, God help me with my boy;
They will kill him ere they're done!

FIRST WOMAN.

Oh, that lot has oft been talked of;
Comfort you: what must be must be!

SECOND WOMAN.

She is utterly demented. [*Calls up the hill.*
Eivind, Anders! Hei! Come here!

A MAN'S VOICE.

What's amiss?

SECOND WOMAN.

Peer Gynt has perched his
Mother on the mill-house roof!

SCENE SECOND

A hillock, covered with bushes and heather. The high-road runs behind it; a fence between.

PEER GYNT *comes along a footpath, goes quickly up to the fence, stops, and looks out over the distant prospect.*

PEER.

Yonder lies Hegstad. Soon I'll have reached it.
[*Puts one leg over the fence; then hesitates.*
Wonder if Ingrid's alone in the house now?
[*Shades his eyes with his hand, and looks out.*
No; to the farm guests are swarming like midges.—
H'm, to turn back now perhaps would be wisest.
[*Draws back his leg.*
Still they must titter behind your back,
And whisper so that it burns right through you.
[*Moves a few steps away from the fence, and begins absently plucking leaves.*
Ah, if I'd only a good strong dram now.
Or if I could pass to and fro unseen.—
Or were I unknown.—Something proper and strong
Were the best thing of all, for the laughter don't bite then.
[*Looks around suddenly as though afraid; then hides among the bushes. Some* WEDDING GUESTS[1] *pass by, going downwards towards the farm.*

A MAN.

[*In conversation as they pass.*]

His father was drunken, his mother is weak.

[1] "Sendingsfolk," literally, "folks with presents." When the Norwegian peasants are bidden to a wedding-feast, they bring with them presents of eatables.

A Woman.

Ay, then it's no wonder the lad's good for nought.

[*They pass on. Presently* Peer Gynt *comes forward, his face flushed with shame. He peers after them.*

Peer.

[*Softly.*]

Was it me they were talking of? [*With a forced shrug.*
O, let them chatter?
After all, they can't sneer the life out of my body.

[*Casts himself down upon the heathery slope; lies for some time flat on his back with his hands under his head, gazing up into the sky.*

What a strange sort of cloud! It is just like a horse.
There's a man on it too—and a saddle—and bridle.—
And after it comes an old crone on a broomstick.
[*Laughs quietly to himself.*
It is mother. She's scolding and screaming: You beast!
Hei you, Peer Gynt—— [*His eyes gradually close.*
Ay, now she is frightened.—
Peer Gynt he rides first, and there follow him many.—
His steed it is gold-shod and crested with silver.
Himself he has gauntlets and sabre and scabbard.
His cloak it is long, and its lining is silken.
Full brave is the company riding behind him.
None of them, though, sits his charger so stoutly.
None of them glitters like him in the sunshine.—
Down by the fence stand the people in clusters,
Lifting their hats, and agape gazing upwards.
Women are curtseying. All the world knows him,
Kaiser Peer Gynt, and his thousands of henchmen.
Sixpenny pieces and glittering shillings

Over the roadway he scatters like pebbles.
Rich as a lord grows each man in the parish.
High o'er the ocean Peer Gynt goes a-riding.
Engelland's Prince on the seashore awaits him;
There too await him all Engelland's maidens.
Engelland's nobles and Engelland's Kaiser,
See him come riding and rise from their banquet.
Raising his crown, hear the Kaiser address him——

ASLAK THE SMITH.

[*To some other young men, passing along the road.*]

Just look at Peer Gynt there, the drunken swine——!

PEER.

[*Starting half up.*]

What, Kaiser——!

THE SMITH.

[*Leaning against the fence and grinning.*]

Up with you, Peer, my lad!

PEER.

What the devil? The smith! What do you want here?

THE SMITH.

[*To the others.*]

He hasn't got over the Lundëspree yet!

PEER.

[*Jumping up.*]

You'd better be off!

THE SMITH.

I am going, yes.
But tell us, where have you dropped from, man?
You've been gone six weeks. Were you troll-taken, eh?

PEER.

I have been doing strange deeds, Aslak Smith!

THE SMITH.

[*Winking to the others.*]

Let us hear them, Peer!

PEER.

They are nought to you.

THE SMITH.

[*After a pause.*]

You're going to Hegstad?

PEER.

No.

THE SMITH.

Time was
They said that the girl there was fond of you.

PEER.

You grimy crow——!

THE SMITH.

[*Falling back a little.*]

Keep your temper, Peer
Though Ingrid has jilted you, others are left;—

Think—son of Jon Gynt! Come on to the feast;
You'll find there both lambkins and well-seasoned widows——

PEER.

To hell——

THE SMITH.

You will surely find one that will have you.—
Good evening! I'll give your respects to the bride.—
[*They go off, laughing and whispering.*

PEER.

[*Looks after them a while, then makes a defiant motion and turns half round.*]

For my part, may Ingrid of Hegstad go marry
Whoever she pleases. It's all one to me.
[*Looks down at his clothes.*
My breeches are torn. I am ragged and grim.—
If only I had something new to put on now.
[*Stamps on the ground.*
If only I could, with a butcher-grip,
Tear out the scorn from their very vitals!
[*Looks round suddenly.*
What was that? Who was it that tittered behind there?
H'm, I certainly thought—— No no, it was no one.—
I'll go home to mother.
[*Begins to go upwards, but stops again and listens towards Hegstad.*
They're playing a dance!
[*Gazes and listens; moves downwards step by step, his eyes glisten; he rubs his hands down his thighs.*
How the lasses do swarm! Six or eight to a man!

Oh, galloping death,—I must join in the frolic!—
But how about mother, perched up on the mill-house——
[*His eyes are drawn downwards again; he leaps and laughs.*
Hei, how the Halling[1] flies over the green!
Ay, Guttorm, he c a n make his fiddle speak out!
It gurgles and booms like a foss[2] o'er a scaur.
And then all that glittering bevy of girls!—
Yes, galloping death, I must join in the frolic!
[*Leaps over the fence and goes down the road.*

SCENE THIRD

The farm-place at Hegstad. In the background, the dwelling-house. A THRONG OF GUESTS. *A lively dance in progress on the green.* THE FIDDLER *sits on a table.* THE KITCHEN-MASTER[3] *is standing in the doorway.* COOKMAIDS *are going to and fro between the different buildings. Groups of* ELDERLY PEOPLE *sit here and there, talking.*

A WOMAN.

[*Joins a group that is seated on some logs of wood.*]

The bride? Oh yes, she is crying a bit;
But that, you know, isn't worth heeding.

THE KITCHEN-MASTER.

[*In another group.*]

Now then, good folk, you must empty the barrel.

[1] A somewhat violent peasant dance.
[2] Foss (in the North of England "force")—a waterfall.
[3] A sort of master of ceremonies.

A Man.

Thanks to you, friend; but you fill up too quick.

A Lad.

[*To the* Fiddler, *as he flies past, holding a* Girl *by the hand.*]

To it now, Guttorm, and don't spare the fiddle-strings!

The Girl.

Scrape till it echoes out over the meadows!

Other Girls.

[*Standing in a ring round a lad who is dancing.*]

That's a rare fling!

A Girl.

He has legs that can lift him!

The Lad.

[*Dancing.*]

The roof here is high,[1] and the walls wide asunder!

The Bridegroom.

[*Comes whimpering up to his* Father, *who is standing talking with some other men, and twitches his jacket.*]

Father, she will not; she is so proud!

His Father.

What won't she do?

[1] To kick the rafters is considered a great feat in the Halling-dance. The boy means that, in the open air, his leaps are not limited even by the rafters.

THE BRIDEGROOM.

She has locked herself in.

HIS FATHER.

Well, you must manage to find the key.

THE BRIDEGROOM.

I don't know how.

HIS FATHER.

You're a nincompoop!

[*Turns away to the others. The* BRIDEGROOM *drifts across the yard.*

A LAD.

[*Comes from behind the house.*]

Wait a bit, girls! Things 'll soon be lively!
Here comes Peer Gynt.

THE SMITH.

[*Who has just come up.*]

Who invited him?

THE KITCHEN-MASTER.

No one.

[*Goes towards the house.*

THE SMITH.

[*To the girls.*]

If he should speak to you, never take notice!

A Girl.

[*To the others.*]

No, we'll pretend that we don't even see him.

Peer Gynt.

[*Comes in heated and full of animation, stops right in front of the group, and claps his hands.*]

Which is the liveliest girl of the lot of you.

A Girl.

[*As he approaches her.*]

I am not.

Another.

[*Similarly.*]

I am not.

A Third.

No; nor I either.

Peer.

[*To a fourth.*]

You come along, then, for want of a better.

The Girl.

Haven't got time.

Peer.

[*To a fifth.*]

Well then, you!

The Girl.

[*Going.*]

I'm for home.

PEER.

To-night? are you utterly out of your senses?[1]

THE SMITH.

[*After a moment, in a low voice.*]

See, Peer, she's taken a greybeard for partner.

PEER.

[*Turns sharply to an elderly man.*]

Where are the unbespoke girls?

THE MAN.

Find them out.

[*Goes away from him.*

PEER GYNT *has suddenly become subdued. He glances shyly and furtively at the group. All look at him, but no one speaks. He approaches other groups. Wherever he goes there is silence; when he moves away they look after him and smile.*

PEER.

[*To himself.*]

Mocking looks; needle-keen whispers[2] and smiles.
They grate like a sawblade under the file!

[*He slinks along close to the fence.* SOLVEIG, *leading little* HELGA *by the hand, comes into the yard, along with her* PARENTS.

A MAN.

[*To another, close to* PEER GYNT.]

Look, here are the new folk.

[1] A marriage party among the peasants will often last several days.
[2] Literally, "thoughts."

THE OTHER.

The ones from the west?

THE FIRST MAN.

Ay, the people from Hedal.

THE OTHER.

Ah yes, so they are.

PEER.

[*Places himself in the path of the newcomers, points to* SOLVEIG, *and asks the* FATHER:]

May I dance with your daughter?

THE FATHER.

[*Quietly.*]

You may so; but first
We must go to the farmhouse and greet the good people.
[*They go in.*

THE KITCHEN-MASTER.

[*To* PEER GYNT, *offering him drink.*]

Since you a r e here, you'd best take a pull at the liquor.

PEER.

[*Looking fixedly after the newcomers.*]

Thanks; I'm for dancing; I am not athirst.
[*The* KITCHEN-MASTER *goes away from him.* PEER GYNT *gazes towards the house and laughs.*
How fair! Did ever you see the like!

Looked down at her shoes and her snow-white apron—!
And then she held on to her mother's skirt-folds,
And carried a psalm-book wrapped up in a kerchief—!
I must look at that girl. [*Going into the house.*

A Lad.

[*Coming out of the house, with several others.*]

Are you off so soon, Peer,
From the dance?

Peer.

No, no

The Lad.

Then you're heading amiss!
[*Takes hold of his shoulder to turn him round.*

Peer.

Let me pass!

The Lad.

I believe you're afraid of the smith.

Peer.

I afraid!

The Lad.

You remember what happened at Lundë?
[*They go off, laughing, to the dancing-green.*

Solveig.

[*In the doorway of the house.*]

Are you not the lad that was wanting to dance?

PEER.

Of course it was me; don't you know me again?
[*Takes her hand.*
Come, then!

SOLVEIG.

We mustn't go far, mother said.

PEER.

Mother said! Mother said! Were you born yesterday?[1]

SOLVEIG.

Now you're laughing——!

PEER.

Why sure, you are almost a child.
Are you grown up?

SOLVEIG.

I read with the pastor last spring.[2]

PEER.

Tell me your name, lass, and then we'll talk easier.

SOLVEIG.

My name is Solveig. And what are you called?

PEER.

Peer Gynt.

[1] Literally, "last year."

[2] "To read with the pastor," the preliminary to confirmation, is currently used as synonymous with "to be confirmed."

SOLVEIG.

[*Withdrawing her hand.*]

Oh, Heaven!

PEER.

Why, what is it now?

SOLVEIG.

My garter is loose; I must tie it up tighter.

[*Goes away from him.*

THE BRIDEGROOM.

[*Pulling at his* MOTHER'S *gown.*]

Mother, she will not——!

HIS MOTHER.

She will not? What?

THE BRIDEGROOM.

She won't, mother——

HIS MOTHER.

What?

THE BRIDEGROOM.

Unlock the door.

HIS FATHER.

[*Angrily, below his breath.*]

Oh, you're only fit to be tied in a stall!

HIS MOTHER.

Don't scold him. Poor dear, he'll be all right yet.
[*They move away.*

A LAD.

[*Coming with a whole crowd of others from the dancing-green.*]

Peer, have some brandy?

PEER.

No.

THE LAD.

Only a drain?

PEER.

[*Looking darkly at him.*]

Got any?

THE LAD.

Well, I won't say but I have.
[*Pulls out a pocket flask and drinks.*
Ah! How it stings your throat!—Well?

PEER.

Let me try it.
[*Drinks.*

ANOTHER LAD.

Now you must try mine as well, you know.

PEER.

No!

THE LAD.

Oh, what nonsense; now don't be a fool.
Take a pull, Peer!

PEER.

Well then, give me a drop.
[*Drinks again.*

A GIRL.

[*Half aloud.*]
Come, let's be going.

PEER.

Afraid of me, wench?

A THIRD LAD.

Who isn't afraid of y o u ?

A FOURTH.

At Lundë
You showed us clearly what tricks you could play.

PEER.

I can do more than that, when I once get started!

THE FIRST LAD.

[*Whispering.*]
Now he's forging ahead!

SEVERAL OTHERS.

[*Forming a circle around him.*
Tell away! Tell away!
What can you——?

PEER.

To-morrow!

OTHERS.

No, now, to-night!

A GIRL.

Can you conjure, Peer?

PEER.

I can call up the devil!

A MAN.

My grandam could do that before I was born!

PEER.

Liar! What *I* can do, that no one else can.
I one day conjured him into a nut.
It was worm-bored, you see!

SEVERAL.

[*Laughing.*]

Ay, that's easily guessed!

PEER.

He cursed, and he wept, and he wanted to bribe me
With all sorts of things——

ONE OF THE CROWD.

But he had to go in?

PEER.

Of course. I stopped up the hole with a peg.
Hei! If you'd heard him rumbling and grumbling!

A GIRL.

Only think!

PEER.

It was just like a humble-bee buzzing.

THE GIRL.

Have you got him still in the nut?

PEER.

Why, no;
By this time that devil has flown on his way.
The grudge the smith bears me is all h i s doing.

A LAD.

Indeed?

PEER.

I went to the smithy, and begged
That he would crack that same nutshell for me.
He promised he would!—laid it down on his anvil;
But Aslak, you know, is so heavy of hand;—
For ever swinging that great sledge-hammer——

A VOICE FROM THE CROWD.

Did he kill the foul fiend?

PEER.

He laid on like a man.
But the devil showed fight, and tore off in a flame
Through the roof, and shattered the wall asunder.

SEVERAL VOICES.

And the smith——?

PEER.

Stood there with his hands all scorched.
And from that day onwards, we've never been friends.
[*General laughter.*

SOME OF THE CROWD.

That yarn is a good one.

OTHERS.

About his best.

PEER.

Do you think I am making it up?

A MAN.

Oh no,
That you're certainly not; for I've heard the most on't
From my grandfather——

PEER.

Liar! It happened to me!

THE MAN.

Yes, like everything else.

PEER.

[*With a fling.*]

I can ride, I can,
Clean through the air, on the bravest of steeds!
Oh, many's the thing I can do, I tell you!
[*Another roar of laughter.*

ONE OF THE GROUP.

Peer, ride through the air a bit!

MANY.

Do, dear Peer Gynt——!

PEER.

You may spare you the trouble of begging so hard.
I will ride like a hurricane over you all!
Every man in the parish shall fall at my feet!

AN ELDERLY MAN.

Now he is clean off his head.

ANOTHER.

The dolt!

A THIRD.

Braggart!

A FOURTH.

Liar!

PEER.

[*Threatening them.*]

Ay, wait till you see!

A MAN.

[*Half drunk.*]

Ay, wait; you'll soon get your jacket dusted!

OTHERS.

Your back beaten tender! Your eyes painted blue!

[*The crowd disperses, the elder men angry, the younger laughing and jeering.*

THE BRIDEGROOM.

[*Close to* PEER GYNT.]

Peer, is it true you can ride through the air?

PEER.

[*Shortly.*]

It's all true, Mads! You must know I'm a rare one!

THE BRIDEGROOM.

Then have you got the Invisible Cloak too?

PEER.

The Invisible Hat, do you mean? Yes, I have.

[*Turns away from him.* SOLVEIG *crosses the yard, leading little* HELGA. PEER *goes towards them; his face lights up.*]

Solveig! Oh, it is well you have come!

[*Takes hold of her wrist.*

Now will I swing you round fast and fine!

SOLVEIG.

Loose me!

PEER.

Wherefore?

SOLVEIG.

You are so wild.

PEER.

The reindeer is wild, too, when summer is dawning.
Come then, lass; do not be wayward now!

SOLVEIG.

[*Withdrawing her arm.*]

Dare not.

PEER.

Wherefore?

SOLVEIG.

No, you've been drinking.
[*Moves off with* HELGA.

PEER.

Oh, if I had but my knife-blade driven
Clean through the heart of them,—one and all!

THE BRIDEGROOM.

[*Nudging him with his elbow.*]

Peer, can't you help me to get at the bride?

PEER.

[*Absently.*]

The bride? Where is she?

THE BRIDEGROOM.

In the store-house.

PEER.

Ah.

THE BRIDEGROOM.

Oh, dear Peer Gynt, you must try at least!

PEER.

No, you must get on without my help.
[*A thought strikes him; he says softly but sharply.*
Ingrid! The store-house! [*Goes up to* SOLVEIG.
Have you thought better on't?
[SOLVEIG *tries to go; he blocks her path.*
You're ashamed to, because I've the look of a tramp.

SOLVEIG.

[*Hastily.*]

No, that you haven't; that's not true at all!

PEER.

Yes! And I've taken a drop as well;
But that was to spite you, because you had hurt me.
Come then!

SOLVEIG.

Even if I wished to, I daren't.

PEER.

Who are you frightened of?

SOLVEIG.

Father, most.

PEER.

Father? Ay, ay, he is one of the quiet ones!
One of the godly, eh?—Answer, come!

SOLVEIG.

What shall I say?

PEER.

Is your father a psalm-singer?[1]
And you and your mother as well, no doubt?
Come, will you speak?

SOLVEIG.

Let me go in peace.

PEER.

No! [*In a low but sharp and threatening tone.*
I can turn myself into a troll!
I'll come to your bedside at midnight to-night.
If you should hear some one hissing and spitting,
You mustn't imagine it's only the cat.
It's me, lass! I'll drain out your blood in a cup,
And your little sister, I'll eat her up;
Ay, you must know I'm a were-wolf at night;—
I'll bite you all over the loins and the back——
[*Suddenly changes his tone and entreats, as if in dread:*
Dance with me, lass!

SOLVEIG.

[*Looking darkly at him.*]

You were ugly then.
[*Goes into the house.*

THE BRIDEGROOM.

[*Comes sidling up again.*]

I'll give you an ox if you'll help me!

[1] Literally, "A reader."

PEER.

Then come!

[*They go out behind the house. At the same moment a crowd of men come forward from the dancing green; most of them are drunk. Noise and hubbub.* SOLVEIG, HELGA, *and their* PARENTS *appear among a number of elderly people in the doorway.*

THE KITCHEN-MASTER.

[*To the* SMITH, *who is the foremost of the crowd.*

Keep peace now!

THE SMITH.

[*Pulling off his jacket.*]

No, we must fight it out here.[1]
Peer Gynt or I must be taught a lesson.[2]

SOME VOICES.

Ay, let them fight for it!

OTHERS.

No, only wrangle!

THE SMITH.

Fists must decide; for the case is past words.

SOLVEIG'S FATHER.

Control yourself, man!

[1] Literally, "Here shall judgment be called for."
[2] Literally, "Must be bent to the hillside," made to bite the dust—but not in the sense of being killed.

HELGA.

Will they beat him, mother?

A LAD.

Let us rather taunt him with all his lies.

ANOTHER.

Kick him out of the company.

A THIRD.

Spit in his eyes.

A FOURTH.

[*To the* SMITH.]

You're not backing out, smith?

THE SMITH.

[*Flinging away his jacket.*]

The jade shall be slaughtered!

SOLVEIG'S MOTHER.

[*To* SOLVEIG.]

There, you can see how that windbag is thought of.

ÅSE.

[*Coming up with a stick in her hand.*]

Is that son of mine here? Now he's in for a drubbing!
Oh! how heartily I will dang him!

THE SMITH.

[*Rolling up his shirt-sleeves.*]

That switch is too light for a carcase like his.

SOME OF THE CROWD.

The smith will dang him!

OTHERS.

Bang him!

THE SMITH.

[*Spits on his hands and nods to* ÅSE.]

Hang him!

ÅSE.

What? Hang my Peer? Ay, just try if you dare;—
Åse and I,[1] we have teeth and claws!—
Where is he? [*Calls across the yard.*] Peer!

THE BRIDEGROOM.

[*Comes running up.*]

Oh, God's death on the cross!
Come father, come mother, and——!

HIS FATHER.

What is the matter?

THE BRIDEGROOM.

Just fancy, Peer Gynt——!

[1] A peasant idiom.

ÅSE.

[*Screams.*]

Have you taken his life?

THE BRIDEGROOM.

No, but Peer Gynt——! Look, there on the hillside——!

THE CROWD.

With the bride!

ÅSE.

[*Lets her stick sink.*]

Oh, the beast!

THE SMITH.

[*As if thunderstruck.*]

Where the slope rises sheerest
He's clambering upwards, by God, like a goat!

THE BRIDEGROOM.

[*Crying.*]

He's shouldered her, mother, as I might a pig!

ÅSE.

[*Shaking her fist up at him.*]

Would God you might fall, and——!

[*Screams out in terror.*

Take care of your footing!

THE HEGSTAD FARMER.

[*Comes in, bare-headed and white with rage.*]

I'll have his life for this bride-rape yet!

ÅSE.

Oh no, God punish me if I let you!

ACT SECOND

SCENE FIRST

A narrow path, high up in the mountains. Early morning.

PEER GYNT *comes hastily and sullenly along the path.* INGRID, *still wearing some of her bridal ornaments, is trying to hold him back.*

PEER.

Get you from me:

INGRID.

[*Weeping.*]

After this, Peer?

Whither?

PEER.

Where you will for me.

INGRID.

[*Wringing her hands.*]

Oh, what falsehood!

PEER.

Useless railing.

Each alone must go his way.

INGRID.

Sin—and sin again unites us!

PEER.

Devil take all recollections!
Devil take the tribe of women—
All but o n e——!

INGRID.

Who is that one, pray?

PEER.

'Tis not you.

INGRID.

Who is it then?

PEER.

Go! Go thither whence you came!
Off! To your father!

INGRID.

Dearest, sweetest——

PEER.

Peace!

INGRID.

You cannot mean it, surely,
What you're saying?

PEER.

Can and do.

INGRID.

First to lure—and then forsake me!

PEER.

And what terms have you to offer?

INGRID.

Hegstad Farm, and more besides.

PEER.

Is your psalm-book in your kerchief?
Where's the gold-mane on your shoulders?
Do you glance adown your apron?
Do you hold your mother's skirt-fold?
Speak!

INGRID.

No, but——

PEER.

Went you to the Pastor [1]
This last spring-tide?

INGRID.

No, but Peer——

PEER.

Is there shyness in your glances?
When I beg, can you deny?

INGRID.

Heaven! I think his wits are going.

[1] See note on page 72.

PEER.

Does your presence sanctify?[1]
Speak!

INGRID.

No, but——

PEER.

What's all the rest then?
[*Going.*

INGRID.

[*Blocking his way.*]

Know you it will cost your neck
Should you fail me?

PEER.

What do I care?

INGRID.

You may win both wealth and honour
If you take me——

PEER.

Can't afford.

INGRID.

[*Bursting into tears.*]

Oh, you lured me——!

PEER.

You were willing.

[1] "Blir der Helg når en dig ser?" literally, "Does it become a holy-day (or holy-tide) when one sees you?"

INGRID.

I was desperate

PEER.

Frantic I.

INGRID.

[*Threatening.*]

Dearly shall you pay for this!

PEER.

Dearest payment cheap I'll reckon.

INGRID.

Is your purpose set?

PEER.

Like flint.

INGRID.

Good! we'll see, then, who's the winner!

[*Goes downwards.*

PEER.

[*Stands silent a moment, then cries:*]

Devil take all recollections!
Devil take the tribe of women!

INGRID.

[*Turning her head, and calling mockingly upwards:*]

All but one!

PEER.

Yes, all but one.

[*They go their several ways.*

SCENE SECOND

Near a mountain tarn; the ground is soft and marshy round about. A storm is gathering.

ÅSE *enters, calling and gazing around her despairingly, in every direction.* SOLVEIG *has difficulty in keeping up with her.* SOLVEIG'S FATHER *and* MOTHER, *with* HELGA, *are some way behind.*

ÅSE.

[*Tossing about her arms, and tearing her hair.*]

All things are against me with wrathful might!
Heaven, and the waters, and the grisly mountains!
Fog-scuds from heaven roll down to bewilder him!
The treacherous waters are lurking to murder him!
The mountains would crush him with landslip and rift!—
And the people too! They're out after his life!
God knows they shan't have it! I can't bear to lose him!
Oh, the oaf! to think that the fiend should tempt him!
[*Turning to* SOLVEIG.
Now isn't it clean unbelievable this?
He, that did nought but romance and tell lies;—
He, whose sole strength was the strength of his jaw;
He, that did never a stroke of true work;—
He——! Oh, a body could both cry and laugh!—
Oh, we clung closely in sorrow and need.
Ay, you must know that my husband, he drank,
Loafed round the parish to roister and prate,
Wasted and trampled our gear under foot.
And meanwhile at home there sat Peerkin and I—
The best we could do was to try to forget;
For ever I've found it so hard to bear up.

It's a terrible thing to look fate in the eyes;
And of course one is glad to be quit of one's cares,
And try all one can to hold thinking aloof.
Some take to brandy, and others to lies;
And we—why we took to fairy-tales
Of princes and trolls and of all sorts of beasts;
And of bride-rapes as well. Ah, but who could have dreamt
That those devil's yarns would have stuck in his head?

[*In a fresh access of terror.*

Hu! What a scream! It's the nixie or droug![1]
Peer! Peer!—Up there on that hillock——!

[*She runs to the top of a little rise, and looks out over the tarn.* SOLVEIG'S FATHER *and* MOTHER *come up.*

ÅSE.

Not a sign to be seen!

THE FATHER.

[*Quietly.*]

It is worst for him!

ÅSE.

[*Weeping.*]

Oh, my Peer! Oh, my own lost lamb!

THE FATHER.

[*Nods mildly.*]

You may well say lost.

ÅSE.

Oh no, don't talk like that!
He is so clever. There's no one like him.

[1] A malevolent water-monster.

THE FATHER.

You foolish woman!

ÅSE.

Oh ay; oh ay;
Foolish I am, but the boy's all right!

THE FATHER.

[*Still softly and with mild eyes.*]

His heart is hardened, his soul is lost.

ÅSE.

[*In terror.*]

No, no, he can't be so hard, our Lord!

THE FATHER.

Do you think he can sigh for his debt of sin?

ÅSE.

[*Eagerly.*]

No, but he can ride through the air on a buck, though!

THE MOTHER.

Christ, are you mad?

THE FATHER.

Why, what do you mean?

ÅSE.

Never a deed is too great for him.
You shall see, if only he lives so long——

THE FATHER.

Best if you saw him on the gallows hanging.

ÅSE.

[*Shrieks.*]

Oh, cross of Christ!

THE FATHER.

In the hangman's hands,
It may be his heart would be turned to repentance.

ÅSE.

[*Bewildered.*]

Oh, you'll soon talk me out of my senses!
We must find him!

THE FATHER.

To rescue his soul.

ÅSE.

And his body!
If he's stuck in the swamp, we must drag him out;
If he's taken by trolls, we must ring the bells for him.

THE FATHER.

H'm!—Here's a sheep-path——

ÅSE.

The Lord will repay you
Your guidance and help!

THE FATHER.

It's a Christian's duty.

ÅSE.

Then the others, fie! they are heathens all;
There was never a one that would go with us——

THE FATHER.

They knew him too well.

ÅSE.

He was too good for them!
[*Wrings her hands.*
And to think—and to think that his life is at stake!

THE FATHER.

Here are tracks of a man.

ÅSE.

Then it's here we must search!

THE FATHER.

We'll scatter around on this side of our sæter.[1]
[*He and his wife go on ahead.*

SOLVEIG.
[*To* ÅSE.]

Say on; tell me more.

ÅSE.

[*Drying her eyes.*]

Of my son, you mean?

[1] *Sæter*—a châlet, or small mountain farm, where the cattle are sent to pasture in the summer months.

SOLVEIG.

Yes;—
Tell everything!

ÅSE.

[*Smiles and tosses her head.*]

Everything?—Soon you'd be tired!

SOLVEIG.

Sooner by far will you tire of the telling
Than I of the hearing.

SCENE THIRD

Low, treeless heights, close under the mountain moorlands; peaks in the distance. The shadows are long; it is late in the day.

PEER GYNT *comes running at full speed, and stops short on the hillside.*

PEER.

The parish is all at my heels in a pack!
Every man of them armed or with gun or with club.
Foremost I hear the old Hegstad-churl howling.—
Now it's noised far and wide that Peer Gynt is abroad!
It is different, this, from a bout with a smith!
This is life! Every limb grows as strong as a bear's.
[*Strikes out with his arms and leaps in the air.*
To crush, overturn, stem the rush of the foss![1]
To strike! Wrench the fir-tree right up by the root!
This is life! This both hardens and lifts one high!
To hell then with all of the savourless lies!

[1] See note, p. 65.

THREE SÆTER GIRLS.[1]

[*Rush across the hillside, screaming and singing.*]

Trond of the Valfjeld![2] Bård and Kårë!
Troll-pack! To-night would you sleep in our arms?

PEER.

To whom do you call?

THE GIRLS.

To the trolls! to the trolls!

FIRST GIRL.

Trond, come with kindness!

SECOND GIRL.

Bård, come with force!

THIRD GIRL.

The cots in the sæter are all standing empty!

FIRST GIRL.

Force is kindness!

SECOND GIRL.

And kindness is force!

THIRD GIRL.

If lads are awanting, one plays with the trolls.

PEER.

Why, where are the lads, then?

[1] See Appendix.
[2] Pronounce *Vaal-fyeld.*

ALL THREE.

[*With a horse-laugh.*]

They cannot come hither!

FIRST GIRL.

Mine called me his sweetheart and called me his darling.
Now he has married a grey-headed widow.

SECOND GIRL.

Mine met a gipsy-wench north on the upland.
Now they are tramping the country together.

THIRD GIRL.

Mine put an end to our bastard brat.
Now his head's grinning aloft on a stake.

ALL THREE.

Trond of the Valfjeld! Bård and Kårë!
Troll-pack! To-night would you sleep in our arms?

PEER.

[*Stands, with a sudden leap, in the midst of them.*]

I'm a three-headed troll, and the boy for three girls!

THE GIRLS.

Are you s u c h a lad, eh?

PEER.

You shall judge for yourselves!

FIRST GIRL.

To the hut! To the hut!

SECOND GIRL.

We have mead!

PEER.

Let it flow!

THIRD GIRL.

No cot shall stand empty this Saturday night!

SECOND GIRL.

[*Kissing him.*]

He sparkles and glisters like white-heated iron.

THIRD GIRL.

[*Doing likewise.*]

Like a baby's eyes from the blackest tarn.

PEER.

[*Dancing in the midst of them.*]

Heavy of heart and wanton of mind.
The eyes full of laughter, the throat of tears!

THE GIRLS.

[*Making mocking gestures towards the mountain-tops, screaming and singing.*]

Trond of the Valfjeld! Bård and Kårë!
Troll-pack!—To-night who shall sleep in our arms?

[*They dance away over the heights, with* PEER GYNT *in their midst.*

SCENE FOURTH

Among the Rondë mountains. Sunset. Shining snow-peaks all around.

PEER GYNT *enters, dizzy and bewildered.*

PEER.

Tower over tower arises!
Hei, what a glittering gate!
Stand! Will you stand! It's drifting
Further and further away!
High on the vane the wind-cock
Arches his wings for flight;—
Blue spread the rifts and bluer,
Locked is the fell and barred.—
What are those trunks and tree-roots,
That grow from the ridge's clefts?
They are warriors heron-footed!
Now they, too, are fading away.
A shimmering like rainbow-streamers
Goes shooting through eyes and brain.
What is it, that far-off chiming?
What's weighing my eyebrows down?
Hu, how my forehead's throbbing—
A tightening red-hot ring——!
I cannot think who the devil
Has bound it around my head! [*Sinks down.*
Flight o'er the Edge of Gendin—
Stuff and accursed lies!
Up o'er the steepest hill-wall
With the bride,—and a whole day drunk;
Hunted by hawks and falcons,

Threatened by trolls and such,
Sporting with crazy wenches:—
Lies and accursed stuff! [*Gazes long upwards.*
Yonder sail two brown eagles.
Southward the wild geese fly.
And here I must splash and stumble
In quagmire and filth knee-deep! [*Springs up*
I'll fly too! I will wash myself clean in
The bath of the keenest winds!
I'll fly high! I will plunge myself fair in
The glorious christening-font!
I will soar far over the sæter;
I will ride myself pure of soul;
I will forth o'er the salt sea waters,
And high over Engelland's prince!
Ay, gaze as ye may, young maidens;
My ride is for none of you;
You're wasting your time in waiting—!
Yet maybe I'll swoop down, too.—
What has come of the two brown eagles—?
They've vanished, the devil knows where!—
There's the peak of a gable rising;
It's soaring on every hand;
It's growing from out the ruins;—
See, the gateway is standing wide!
Ha-ha, yonder house, I know it;
It's grandfather's new-built farm!
Gone are the clouts from the windows;
The crazy old fence is gone.
The lights gleam from every casement;
There's a feast in the hall to-night.
There, that was the provost clinking
The back of his knife on his glass;—
There's the captain flinging his bottle,

And shivering the mirror to bits.—
Let them waste; let it all be squandered!
Peace, mother; what need we care!
'Tis the rich Jon Gynt gives the banquet;
Hurrah for the race of Gynt!
What's all this bustle and hubbub?
Why do they shout and bawl?
The captain is calling the son in;—
Oh, the provost would drink my health.
In then, Peer Gynt, to the judgment;
It rings forth in song and shout:
Peer Gynt, thou art come of great things,
And great things shall come of thee!

[*Leaps forward, but runs his head against a rock, falls, and remains stretched on the ground.*

SCENE FIFTH

A hillside, wooded with great soughing trees. Stars are gleaming through the leaves; birds are singing in the tree-tops.

A Green-Clad Woman *is crossing the hillside;* Peer Gynt *follows her, with all sorts of lover-like antics.*

The Green-Clad One.

[*Stops and turns round.*]

Is it true?

Peer.

[*Drawing his finger across his throat.*]

As true as my name is Peer;—
As true as that you are a lovely woman!

Will you have me? You'll see what a fine man I'll be;
You shall neither tread the loom nor turn the spindle.
You shall eat all you want, till you're ready to burst.
I never will drag you about by the hair——

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

Nor beat me!

PEER.

No, can you think I would!
We kings' sons never beat women and such.

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

You're a king's son?

PEER.

Yes.

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

I'm the Dovrë-King's daughter.

PEER.

Are you! See there, now, how well that fits in!

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

Deep in the Rondë has father his palace.

PEER.

My mother's is bigger, or much I'm mistaken.

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

Do you know my father? His name is King Brosë.[1]

[1] Pronounce Broasë.

PEER.

Do you know my mother? Her name is Queen Åse.

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

When my father is angry the mountains are riven.

PEER.

They reel when my mother by chance falls a-scolding.

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

My father can kick e'en the loftiest roof-tree.[1]

PEER.

My mother can ride through the rapidest river.

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

Have you other garments besides those rags?

PEER.

Ho, you should just see my Sunday clothes!

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

My week-day gown is of gold and silk.

PEER.

It looks to me liker tow and straws.

[1] Kicking the rafters is a much-admired exploit in peasant dancing. See note, page 66.

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

Ay, there is o n e thing you must remember:—
This is the Rondë-folk's use and wont:
All our possessions have two-fold form.
When shall you come to my father's hall,
It well may chance that you're on the point
Of thinking you stand in a dismal moraine.

PEER.

Well now, with us it's precisely the same.
Our gold will seem to you litter and trash!
And you'll think, mayhap, every glittering pane
Is nought but a bunch of old stockings and clouts.

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

Black it seems white, and ugly seems fair.

PEER.

Big it seems little, and dirty seems clean.

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

[*Falling on his neck.*]

Ay, Peer, now I see that we fit, you and I!

PEER.

Like the leg and the trouser, the hair and the comb.

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

[*Calls away over the hillside.*]

Bridal-steed! Bridal-steed! Come, bridal-steed mine!

[*A gigantic pig comes running in with a rope's end for a bridle and an old sack for a saddle.* PEER

GYNT *vaults on its back, and seats the* GREEN-CLAD ONE *in front of him.*

PEER.

Hark-away! Through the Rondë-gate gallop we in!
Gee-up, gee-up, my courser fine!

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

[*Tenderly.*]

Ah, but lately I wandered and moped and pined—
One never can tell what may happen to one!

PEER.

[*Thrashing the pig and trotting off.*]

You may know the great by their riding-gear!

SCENE SIXTH

The Royal Hall of the King of the Dovrë-Trolls. A great assembly of TROLL-COURTIERS, GNOMES, *and* BROWNIES. THE OLD MAN OF THE DOVRË *sits on the throne, crowned, and with his sceptre in his hand. His* CHILDREN *and* NEAREST RELATIONS *are ranged on both sides.* PEER GYNT *stands before him. Violent commotion in the hall.*

THE TROLL-COURTIERS.

Slay him! a Christian-man's son has deluded
The Dovrë-King's loveliest maid!

A TROLL-IMP.

May I hack him on the fingers?

ANOTHER.

May I tug him by the hair?

A TROLL-MAIDEN.

Hu, hei, let me bite him in the haunches!

A TROLL-WITCH.

[*With a ladle.*]

Shall he be boiled into broth and bree?

ANOTHER TROLL-WITCH.

[*With a chopper.*]

Shall he roast on a spit or be browned in a stewpan?

THE OLD MAN OF THE DOVRË.

Ice to your blood, friends!

[*Beckons his counsellors closer around him.*

Don't let us talk big,
We've been drifting astern in these latter years;
We can't tell what's going to stand or to fall,
And there's no sense in turning recruits away.
Besides the lad's body has scarce a blemish,
And he's strongly-built too, if I see aright.
It's true, he has only a single head;
But my daughter, too, has no more than one.
Three-headed trolls are gone clean out of fashion;
One hardly sees even a two-header now,
And even those heads are but so so ones.

[*To* PEER GYNT.]

It's my daughter, then, you demand of me?

PEER.

Your daughter and the realm to her dowry, yes.

THE OLD MAN.

You shall have the half while I'm still alive,
And the other half when I come to die.

PEER.

I'm content with that.

THE OLD MAN.

Ay, but stop, my lad;—
You also have some undertakings to give.
If you break even one, the whole pact's at an end,
And you'll never get away from here living.
First of all you must swear that you'll never give heed
To aught that lies outside the Rondë-hills' bounds;
Day you must shun, and deeds, and each sunlit spot.

PEER.

Only call me king, and that's easy to keep.

THE OLD MAN.

And next—now for putting your wits to the test.
[*Draws himself up in his seat.*

THE OLDEST TROLL-COURTIER.

[*To* PEER GYNT.]

Let us see if you have a wisdom-tooth
That can crack the Dovrë-King's riddle-nut!

THE OLD MAN.

What difference is there 'twixt trolls and men?

PEER.

No difference at all, as it seems to me.
Big trolls would roast you and small trolls would claw you;—
With us it were likewise, if only they dared.

THE OLD MAN.

True enough; in that and in more we're alike.
Yet morning is morning, and even is even,
And there i s a difference all the same.—
Now let me tell you wherein it lies:
Out yonder, under the shining vault,
Among men the saying goes: "Man, be thyself!"
At home here with us, 'mid the tribe of the trolls,
The saying goes: "Troll, to thyself be—enough!"

THE TROLL-COURTIER.

[*To* PEER GYNT.]

Can you fathom the depth?

PEER.

It strikes me as misty.

THE OLD MAN.

My son, that "Enough," that most potent and sundering Word, must be graven upon your escutcheon.

PEER.

[*Scratching his head.*]

Well, but——

THE OLD MAN.

It m u s t, if you here would be master!

PEER.

Oh well, let it pass; after all, it's no worse——

THE OLD MAN.

And next you must learn to appreciate
Our homely, everyday way of life.
[*He beckons; two* TROLLS *with pigs'-heads, white night-caps, and so forth, bring in food and drink.*
The cow gives cakes and the bullock mead;
Ask not if its taste be sour or sweet;
The main matter is, and you mustn't forget it,
It's all of it home-brewed.

PEER.

[*Pushing the things away from him.*]

The devil fly off with your home-brewed drinks!
I'll never get used to the ways of this land.

THE OLD MAN.

The bowl's given in, and it's fashioned of gold.
Whoso own the gold bowl, him my daughter holds dear.

PEER.

[*Pondering.*]

It is written: Thou shalt bridle the natural man;—
And I daresay the drink may in time seem less sour.
So be it! [*Complies.*

THE OLD MAN.

Ay, that was sagaciously said.
You spit?

PEER.

One must trust to the force of habit.

THE OLD MAN.

And next you must throw off your Christian-man's garb;
For this you must know to our Dovrë's renown:
Here all things are mountain-made, nought's from the dale,
Except the silk bow at the end of your tail.

PEER.

[*Indignant.*]

I haven't a tail!

THE OLD MAN.

Then of course you must get one.
See my Sunday-tail, Chamberlain, fastened to him.

PEER.

I'll be hanged if you do! Would you make me a fool?

THE OLD MAN.

None comes courting my child with no tail at his rear.

PEER.

Make a beast of a man!

THE OLD MAN.

Nay, my son, you mistake;
I make you a mannerly wooer, no more.
A bright orange bow we'll allow you to wear,
And that passes here for the highest of honours.

PEER.

[*Reflectively.*]

It's true, as the saying goes: Man's but a mote.
And it's wisest to follow the fashion a bit.
Tie away!

THE OLD MAN.

You're a tractable fellow, I see.

THE COURTIER.

Just try with what grace you can waggle and whisk it!

PEER.

[*Peevishly.*]

Ha, would you force me to go still further?
Do you ask me to give up my Christian faith?

THE OLD MAN.

No, that you are welcome to keep in peace.
Doctrine goes free; upon that there's no duty;
It's the outward cut one must tell a troll by.
If we're only at one in our manners and dress,
You may hold as your faith what to us is a horror.

PEER.

Why, in spite of your many conditions, you are
A more reasonable chap than one might have expected.

THE OLD MAN.

We troll-folk, my son, are less black than we're painted;[1]
That's another distinction between you and us.—

[1] Literally, "Better than our reputation."

But the serious part of the meeting is over;
Now let us gladden our ears and our eyes.
Music-maid, forth! Set the Dovrë-harp sounding!
Dancing-maid, forth! Tread the Dovrë-hall's floor!
[*Music and a dance.*

THE COURTIER.

How like you it?

PEER.

Like it? H'm——

THE OLD MAN.

Speak without fear!
What see you?

PEER.

Why something unspeakably grim:[1]
A bell-cow with her hoof on a gut-harp strumming.
A sow in socklets a-trip to the tune.

THE COURTIERS.

Eat him!

THE OLD MAN.

His sense is but human, remember!

TROLL-MAIDENS.

Hu, tear away both his ears and his eyes!

[1] "Ustyggelig stygt." "Ustyggelig" seems to be what Mr. Lewis Carroll calls a portmanteau word, compounded of "usigelig" = unspeakable, and "styg" = ugly. The words might be rendered "beyond grimness grim."

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

[*Weeping.*]

Hu-hu! And this we must hear and put up with,
When I and my sister make music and dance.

PEER.

Oho, was it you? Well, a joke at the feast,
You must know, is never unkindly meant.

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

Can you swear it was so?

PEER.

Both the dance and the music
Were utterly charming, the cat claw me else.

THE OLD MAN.

This same human nature's a singular thing;
It sticks to people so strangely long.
If it gets a gash in the fight with us,
It heals up at once, though a scar may remain.
My son-in-law, now, is as pliant as any;
He's willingly thrown off his Christian-man's garb,
He's willingly drunk from our chalice of mead,
He's willingly fastened the tail to his back,—
So willing, in short, did we find him in all things,
I thought to myself the old Adam, for certain,
Had for good and all been kicked out of doors;
But lo! in two shakes he's atop again!
Ay ay, my son, we must treat you, I see,
To cure this pestilent human nature.

PEER.

What will you do?

THE OLD MAN.

In your left eye, first,
I'll scratch you a bit, till you see awry;
But all that you see will seem fine and brave.
And then I'll just cut your right window-pane out——

PEER.

Are you drunk?

THE OLD MAN.

[*Lays a number of sharp instruments on the table.*]

See, here are the glazier's tools.
Blinkers you'll wear, like a raging bull.
Then you'll recognise that your bride is lovely,—
And ne'er will your vision be troubled, as now,
With bell-cows harping and sows that dance.

PEER.

This is madman's talk!

THE OLDEST COURTIER.

It's the Dovrë-King speaking;
'Tis he that is wise, and 'tis you that are crazy!

THE OLD MAN.

Just think how much worry and mortification
You'll thus escape from, year out, year in.
You must remember, your eyes are the fountain
Of the bitter and searing lye of tears.

PEER.

That's true; and it says in our sermon-book:
If thine eye offend thee, then pluck it out.
But tell me, when will my sight heal up
Into human sight?

THE OLD MAN.

Nevermore, my friend.

PEER.

Indeed! In that case, I'll take my leave.

THE OLD MAN.

What would you without?

PEER.

I would go my way.

THE OLD MAN.

No, stop! It's easy to slip in here,
But outward the Dovrë-King's gate opens not.

PEER.

You wouldn't detain me by force, I hope?

THE OLD MAN.

Come now, just listen to reason, Prince Peer!
You have gifts for trolldom. He acts—does he not?—
Even now in a passably troll-like fashion?
And you'd fain be a troll?

PEER.

Yes, I would, sure enough
For a bride, and a well-managed kingdom to boot,
I can put up with losing a good many things.
But there is a limit to all things on earth.
The tail I've accepted, it's perfectly true;
But no doubt I can loose what the Chamberlain tied.
My breeches I've dropped; they were old and patched;
But no doubt I can button them on again.
And lightly enough I can slip my cable
From these your Dovrëfied ways of life.
I am willing to swear that a cow is a maid;
An oath one can always eat up again;—
But to know that one never can free oneself,
That one can't even die like a decent soul;
To live as a hill-troll for all one's days—
To feel that one never can beat a retreat,—
As the book has it, t h a t ' s what your heart is set on;
But that is a thing I can never agree to.

THE OLD MAN.

Now, sure as I live, I shall soon lose my temper;
And then I am not to be trifled with.
You pasty-faced loon! Do you know who I am?
First with my daughter you make too free——

PEER.

There you lie in your throat!

THE OLD MAN.

You must marry her!

PEER.

Do you dare to accuse me——?

THE OLD MAN.

What? Can you deny
That you lusted for her in heart and eye?

PEER.

[*With a snort of contempt.*]

No more? Who the deuce cares a straw for that?

THE OLD MAN.

It's ever the same with this humankind.
The spirit you're ready to own with your lips,
But in fact nothing counts that your fists cannot handle.
So you really think, then, that lust matters nought?
Wait; you shall soon have ocular proof of it——

PEER.

You don't catch me with a bait of lies!

THE GREEN-CLAD ONE.

My Peer, ere the year's out, your child will be born.

PEER.

Open doors! let me go!

THE OLD MAN.

In a he-goat's skin,
You shall have the brat after you.

PEER.

[*Mopping the sweat off his brow.*]

Would I could waken!

THE OLD MAN.

Shall we send him to the palace?

PEER.

You can send him to the parish!

THE OLD MAN.

Well, well, Prince Peer; that's your own look-out.
But one thing's certain, what's done is done;
And your offspring, too, will be sure to grow;
Such mongrels shoot up amazingly fast——

PEER.

Old man, don't act like a headstrong ox!
Hear reason, maiden! Let's come to terms.
You must know I'm neither a prince nor rich;—
And whether you measure or whether you weigh me,
Be sure you won't gain much by making me yours.

[THE GREEN-CLAD ONE *is taken ill, and is carried out by* TROLL-MAIDS.

THE OLD MAN.

[*Looks at him for a while in high disdain; then says:*]

Dash him to shards on the rock-walls, children!

THE TROLL-IMPS.

Oh, dad, mayn't we play owl-and-eagle first:
The wolf-game! Grey-mouse and glow-eyed cat!

THE OLD MAN.

Yes, but quick. I am worried and sleepy. Good-night!

[*He goes.*

PEER.

[*Hunted by the* TROLL-IMPS.]

Let me be, devil's imps!

[*Tries to escape up the chimney.*

THE IMPS.

Come brownies! Come nixies!
Bite him behind!

PEER.

Ow!

[*Tries to slip down the cellar trap-door.*

THE IMPS.

Shut up all the crannies!

THE TROLL-COURTIER.

Now the small-fry are happy!

PEER.

[*Struggling with a little* IMP *that has bit himself fast to his ear.*]

Let go, will you, beast!

THE COURTIER.

[*Hitting him across the fingers.*]

Gently, you scamp, with a scion of royalty!

PEER.

A rat-hole——! [*Runs to it.*

THE IMPS.

Be quick, Brother Nixie, and block it!

PEER.

The old one was bad, but the youngsters are worse!

THE IMPS.

Slash him!

PEER.

Oh, would I were small as a mouse!
[*Rushing around.*

THE IMPS.

[*Swarming round him.*]

Close the ring! Close the ring!

PEER.

[*Weeping.*]

Were I only a louse!
[*He falls.*

THE IMPS.

Now into his eyes!

PEER.

[*Buried in a heap of* IMPS.]

Mother, help me, I die!
[*Church bells sound far away.*

THE IMPS.

Bells in the mountain! The Black-Frock's cows!

[THE TROLLS *take to flight, amid a confused uproar of yells and shrieks. The palace collapses; everything disappears.*

SCENE SEVENTH

Pitch darkness.

PEER GYNT *is heard beating and slashing about him with a large bough.*

PEER.

Answer! Who are you?

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS.

Myself.

PEER.

Clear the way!

THE VOICE.

Go roundabout, Peer! The hill's roomy enough.

PEER.

[*Tries to force a passage at another place, but strikes against something.*]

Who are y o u?

THE VOICE.

Myself. Can you say the same?

PEER.

I can say what I will; and my sword can smite!
Mind yourself! Hu, hei, now the blow falls crushing!
King Saul slew hundreds; Peer Gynt slew thousands!
[*Cutting and slashing.*

Who a r e you!

THE VOICE.

Myself.

PEER.

That stupid reply
You may spare; it doesn't clear up the matter.
What are you?

THE VOICE.

The great Boyg.[1]

PEER.

Ah, indeed!
The riddle was black; now I'd call it grey.
Clear the way then, Boyg!

THE VOICE.

Go roundabout, Peer!

PEER.

No, through! [*Cuts and slashes.*
There he fell!
[*Tries to advance, but strikes against something.*
Ho ho, are there more here?

THE VOICE.

The Boyg, Peer Gynt! the one only one.
It's the Boyg that's unwounded, and the Boyg that was hurt,
It's the Boyg that is dead, and the Boyg that's alive.

PEER.

[*Throws away the branch.*]

The weapon is troll-smeared;[2] but I have my fists!
[*Fights his way forward.*

[1] See Introduction and Appendix.
[2] Rendered harmless by magical anointing.

THE VOICE.

Ay, trust to your fists, lad, trust to your body.
Hee-hee, Peer Gynt, so you'll reach the summit.

PEER.

[*Falling back again.*]

Forward or back, and it's just as far;—
Out or in, and it's just as strait![1]
He is t h e r e! And t h e r e! And he's round the bend!
No sooner I'm out than I'm back in the ring.—
Name who you are! Let me see you! What are you?

THE VOICE.

The Boyg.

PEER.

[*Groping around.*]

Not dead, not living; all slimy; misty.
Not so much as a shape! It's as bad as to battle
In a cluster of snarling, half-wakened bears! [*Screams*
Strike back at me, can't you!

THE VOICE.

The Boyg isn't mad.

PEER.

Strike!

THE VOICE.

The Boyg strikes not.

PEER.

Fight! You shall!

[1] "Atter og fram, det er lige langt;—
ud og ind, det er lige trangt!"

THE VOICE.

The great Boyg conquers, but does not fight.

PEER.

Were there only a nixie here that could prick me!
Were there only as much as a year-old troll!
Only something to fight with. But here there is nothing—
Now he's snoring! Boyg!

THE VOICE.

What's your will?

PEER.

Use force!

THE VOICE.

The great Boyg conquers in all things without it.[1]

PEER.

[*Biting his own arms and hands.*]

Claws and ravening teeth in my flesh!
I must feel the drip of my own warm blood.
[*A sound is heard like the wing-strokes of great birds.*

BIRD-CRIES.

Comes he now, Boyg?

THE VOICE.

Ay, step by step.

[1] "Med lempe," literally, "by gentleness" or "easy-going-ness." "Quiescence" is somewhere near the idea.

BIRD-CRIES.

All our sisters far off! Gather here to the tryst!

PEER.

If you'd save me now, lass, you must do it quick!
Gaze not adown so, lowly and bending.—
Your clasp-book! Hurl it straight into his eyes!

BIRD-CRIES.

He totters!

THE VOICE.

We have him!

BIRD-CRIES.

Sisters! Make haste!

PEER.

Too dear the purchase one pays for life
In such a heart-wasting hour of strife. [*Sinks down.*

BIRD-CRIES.

Boyg, there he's fallen! Seize him! Seize him!

[*A sound of bells and of psalm-singing is heard far away.*

THE BOYG.

[*Shrinks up to nothing, and says in a gasp:*]

He was too strong. There were women behind him.

SCENE EIGHTH

Sunrise. The mountain-side in front of ÅSE'S *sæter. The door is shut; all is silent and deserted.*

PEER GYNT *is lying asleep by the wall of the sæter.*

PEER.

[*Wakens, and looks about him with dull and heavy eyes. He spits.*]

What wouldn't I give for a pickled herring!

[*Spits again, and at the same moment catches sight of* HELGA, *who appears carrying a basket of food.*

Ha, child, are you there? What is it you want?

HELGA.

It is Solveig——

PEER.

[*Jumping up.*]

Where is she?

HELGA.

Behind the sæter.

SOLVEIG.

[*Unseen.*]

If you come nearer, I'll run away!

PEER.

[*Stopping short.*]

Perhaps you're afraid I might take you in my arms?

SOLVEIG.

For shame!

PEER.

Do you know where I was last night?—
Like a horse-fly the Dovrë-King's daughter is after me.

SOLVEIG.

Then it was well that the bells were set ringing.

PEER.

Peer Gynt's not the lad they can lure astray.—
What do you say?

HELGA.

[*Crying.*]

Oh, she's running away!
[*Running after her.*
Wait!

PEER.

[*Catches her by the arm.*]

Look here, what I have in my pocket!
A silver button, child! You shall have it,—
Only speak for me!

HELGA.

Let me be; let me go!

PEER.

There you have it.

HELGA.

Let go; there's the basket of food.

PEER.

God pity you if you don't——

HELGA.

Uf, how you scare me!

PEER.

[*Gently; letting her go.*]

No, I only meant: beg her not to forget me!

[HELGA *runs off.*

ACT THIRD

SCENE FIRST

Deep in the pine-woods. Grey autumn weather. Snow is falling.

PEER GYNT *stands in his shirt-sleeves, felling timber.*

PEER.

[*Hewing at a large fir-tree with twisted branches.*]

Oh ay, you are tough, you ancient churl;
But it's all in vain, for you'll soon be down.
[*Hews at it again.*
I see well enough you've a chain-mail shirt,
But I'll hew it through, were it never so stout.—
Ay, ay, you're shaking your twisted arms;
You've reason enough for your spite and rage;
But none the less you must bend the knee——!
[*Breaks off suddenly.*
Lies! 'Tis an old tree and nothing more.
Lies! It was never a steel-clad churl;
It's only a fir-tree with fissured bark.—
It is heavy labour this hewing timber;
But the devil and all when you hew and dream too.—
I'll have done with it all—with this dwelling in mist,
And, broad-awake, dreaming your senses away.—
You're an outlaw, lad! You are banned to the woods.
[*Hews for a while rapidly.*
Ay, an outlaw, ay. You've no mother now
To spread your table and bring your food.

If you'd eat, my lad, you must help yourself,
Fetch your rations raw from the wood and stream,
Split your own fir-roots [1] and light your own fire,
Bustle around, and arrange and prepare things.
Would you clothe yourself warmly, you must stalk your deer;
Would you found you a house, you must quarry the stones;
Would you build up its walls, you must fell the logs,
And shoulder them all to the building-place.—
[*His axe sinks down; he gazes straight in front of him.*
Brave shall the building be. Tower and vane
Shall rise from the roof-tree, high and fair.
And then I will carve, for the knob on the gable,
A mermaid, shaped like a fish from the navel.
Brass shall there be on the vane and the door-locks.
Glass I must see and get hold of too.
Strangers, passing, shall ask amazed:
What is that glittering far on the hillside?
[*Laughs angrily.*
Devil's own lies! There they come again.
You're an outlaw, lad! [*Hewing vigorously.*
A bark-thatched hovel
Is shelter enough both in rain and frost.
[*Looks up at the tree.*
Now he stands wavering. There; only a kick,
And he topples and measures his length on the ground;—
The thick-swarming undergrowth shudders around him!
[*Begins lopping the branches from the trunk; suddenly he listens, and stands motionless with his axe in the air.*
There's some one after me!—Ay, are you that sort,

[1] "Tyri," resinous pine-wood which burns with a bright blaze.

Old Hegstad-churl; would you play me false?
[*Crouches behind the tree, and peeps over it.*
A lad! One only. He seems afraid.
He peers all round him. What's that he hides
'Neath his jacket? A sickle. He stops and looks round,—
Now he lays his hand on a fence-rail flat.
What's this now? Why does he lean like that——?
Ugh, ugh! Why, he's chopped his finger off!
A whole finger off!—He bleeds like an ox.—
Now he takes to his heels with his fist in a clout. [*Rises.*
What a devil of a lad! An unmendable [1] finger!
Right off! And with no one compelling him to it!
Ho, now I remember! It's only thus
You can 'scape from having to serve the King.
That's it. They wanted to send him soldiering,
And of course the lad didn't want to go.—
But to chop off——? To sever for good and all——?
Ay, think of it—wish it done—w i l l it to boot,—
But do it——! No, that's past my understanding!
[*Shakes his head a little; then goes on with his work.*

SCENE SECOND

A room in Åse's *house. Everything in disorder; boxes standing open; wearing apparel strewn around. A cat is lying on the bed.*

Åse *and the* Cottar's Wife *are hard at work packing things together and putting them straight.*

Åse.

[*Running to one side.*]

Kari, come here!

[1] "Umistelig"—unlosable, indispensable, irreplaceable.

KARI.

What now?

ÅSE.

[*On the other side.*]

Come here——?
Where is——? Where shall I find——? Tell me where——?
What am I seeking? I'm out of my wits!
Where is the key of the chest?

KARI.

In the key-hole.

ÅSE.

What is that rumbling?

KARI.

The last cart-load
They're driving to Hegstad.

ÅSE.

[*Weeping.*]

How glad I'd be
In the black chest myself to be driven away!
Oh, what must a mortal abide and live through!
God help me in mercy! The whole house is bare!
What the Hegstad-churl left now the Bailiff [1] has taken.
Not even the clothes on my back have they spared.
Fie! Shame on them all that have judged so hardly!
[*Seats herself on the edge of the bed.*

[1] "Lensmand," the lowest functionary in the Norwegian official scale—a sort of parish officer.

Both the land and the farm-place are lost to our line;
The old man was hard, but the law was still harder;—
There was no one to help me, and none would show mercy;
Peer was away; not a soul to give counsel.

KARI.

But here, in this house, you may dwell till you die.

ÅSE.

Ay, the cat and I live on charity.

KARI.

God help you, mother; your Peer's cost you dear.

ÅSE.

Peer? Why, you're out of your senses, sure!
Ingrid came home none the worse in the end.
The right thing had been to hold Satan to reckoning;—
He was the sinner, ay, he and none other;
The ugly beast tempted my poor boy astray.

KARI.

Had I not better send word to the parson?
Mayhap you're worse than you think you are.

ÅSE.

To the parson? Truly I almost think so. [*Starts up.*
But, oh God, I can't! I'm the boy's own mother;
And help him I must; it's no more than my duty;
I must do what I can when the rest forsake him.

They've left him his coat; I must patch it up.
I wish I dared snap up the fur-rug as well!
What's come of the hose?

KARI.

They are there, 'mid that rubbish.

ÅSE.

[*Rummaging about.*]

Why, what have we here? I declare it's an old
Casting-ladle, Kari! With this he would play
Button-moulder, would melt, and then shape, and then
stamp them.
One day—there was company—in the boy came,
And begged of his father a lump of tin.
"Not tin," says Jon, "but King Christian's coin;
Silver; to show you're the son of Jon Gynt."
God pardon him, Jon; he was drunk, you see,
And then he cared neither for tin nor for gold.
Here are the hose. Oh, they're nothing but holes;
They want darning, Kari!

KARI.

Indeed but they do.

ÅSE.

When that is done, I must get to bed;
I feel so broken, and frail, and ill—— [*Joyfully.*
Two woollen-shirts, Kari;—they've passed them by!

KARI.

So they have indeed.

ÅSE.

It's a bit of luck.
One of the two you may put aside;
Or rather, I think we'll e'en take them both;—
The one he has on is so worn and thin.

KARI.

But oh, Mother Åse, I fear it's a sin.

ÅSE.

Maybe; but remember the priest holds out
Pardon for this and our other sinnings.

SCENE THIRD

In front of a settler's newly-built hut in the forest. A reindeer's horns over the door. The snow is lying deep around. It is dusk.

PEER GYNT *is standing outside the door, fastening a large wooden bar to it.*

PEER.

[*Laughing between whiles.*]

Bars I must fix me; bars that can fasten
The door against troll-folk, and men, and women.
Bars I must fix me; bars that can shut out
All the cantankerous little hobgoblins.—
They come with the darkness, they knock and they rattle:
Open, Peer Gynt, we're as nimble as thoughts are!
'Neath the bedstead we bustle, we rake in the ashes,
Down the chimney we hustle like fiery-eyed dragons.

Hee-hee! Peer Gynt; think you staples and planks
Can shut out cantankerous hobgoblin-thoughts?

[SOLVEIG *comes on snow-shoes over the heath; she has a shawl over her head, and a bundle in her hand.*

SOLVEIG.

God prosper your labour. You must not reject me.
You sent for me hither, and so you must take me.

PEER.

Solveig! It cannot be——! Ay, but it is!—
And you're not afraid to come near to me!

SOLVEIG.

One message you sent me by little Helga;
Others came after in storm and in stillness.
All that your mother told bore me a message,
That brought forth others when dreams sank upon me.
Nights full of heaviness, blank, empty days,
Brought me the message that now I must come.
It seemed as though life had been quenched down there;
I could nor laugh nor weep from the depths of my heart.
I knew not for sure how you might be minded;
I knew but for sure what I should do and must do.

PEER.

But your father?

SOLVEIG.

In all of God's wide earth
I have none I can call either father or mother.
I have loosed me from all of them.

PEER.

Solveig, you fair one—
And to come to me?

SOLVEIG.

Ay, to you alone;
You must be all to me, friend and consoler. [*In tears.*
The worst was leaving my little sister;—
But parting from father was worse, still worse;
And worst to leave her at whose breast I was borne;—
Oh no, God forgive me, the worst I must call
The sorrow of leaving them all, ay all!

PEER.

And you know the doom that was passed in spring?
It forfeits my farm and my heritage.

SOLVEIG.

Think you for heritage, goods, and gear,
I forsook the paths all my dear ones tread?

PEER.

And know you the compact? Outside the forest
Whoever may meet me may seize me at will.

SOLVEIG.

I ran upon snow-shoes; I asked my way on;
They said "Whither go you?" I answered, "I go home."

PEER.

Away, away then with nails and planks!
No need now for bars against hobgoblin-thoughts.

If you dare dwell with the hunter here,
I know the hut will be blessed from ill.
Solveig! Let me look at you! Not too near!
Only look at you! Oh, but you are bright and pure!
Let me lift you! Oh, but you are fine and light!
Let me carry you, Solveig, and I'll never be tired!
I will not soil you. With outstretched arms
I will hold you far out from me, lovely and warm one!
Oh, who would have thought I could draw you to me,—
Ah, but I have longed for you, daylong and nightlong.
Here you may see I've been hewing and building;—
It must down again, dear; it is ugly and mean——

SOLVEIG.

Be it mean or brave,—here is all to my mind.
One so lightly draws breath in the teeth of the wind.
Down below it was airless; one felt as though choked;
That was partly what drove me in fear from the dale.
But here, with the fir-branches soughing o'erhead,—
What a stillness and song!—I am here in my home.

PEER.

And know you that surely? For all your days?

SOLVEIG.

The path I have trodden leads back nevermore.

PEER.

You are mine then! In! In the room let me see you!
Go in! I must go to fetch fir-roots [1] for fuel.

[1]See note, p. 134.

Warm shall the fire be and bright shall it shine,
You shall sit softly and never be a-cold.

[*He opens the door;* SOLVEIG *goes in. He stands still for a while, then laughs aloud with joy and leaps into the air.*

PEER.

My king's daughter! Now I have found her and won her!
Hei! Now the palace shall rise, deeply founded!

He seizes his axe and moves away; at the same moment an OLD-LOOKING WOMAN, *in a tattered green gown, comes out from the wood; an* UGLY BRAT, *with an ale-flagon in his hand, limps after, holding on to her skirt.*

THE WOMAN.

Good evening, Peer Lightfoot!

PEER.

What is it? Who's there?

THE WOMAN.

Old friends of yours, Peer Gynt! My home is near by. We are neighbours.

PEER.

Indeed! That is more than I know.

THE WOMAN.

Even as your hut was builded, mine built itself too.

PEER.

[*Going.*]

I'm in haste——

THE WOMAN.

Yes, that you are always, my lad;
But I'll trudge behind you and catch you at last.

PEER.

You're mistaken, good woman!

THE WOMAN.

I was so before;
I was when you promised such mighty fine things.

PEER.

I promised——? What devil's own nonsense is this?

THE WOMAN.

You've forgotten the night when you drank with my sire?
You've forgot——?

PEER.

I've forgot what I never have known.
What's this that you prate of? When last did we meet?

THE WOMAN.

When last we met was when first we met.
[*To* THE BRAT.]
Give your father a drink; he is thirsty, I'm sure.

PEER.

Father? You're drunk, woman! Do you call h i m——?

THE WOMAN.

I should think you might well know the pig by its skin!
Why, where are your eyes? Can't you see that he's lame
In his shank, just as you too are lame in your soul?

PEER.

Would you have me believe——?

THE WOMAN.

Would you wriggle away——?

PEER.

This long-leggëd urchin——!

THE WOMAN.

He's shot up apace.

PEER.

Dare you, you troll-snout, father on me——?

THE WOMAN.

Come now, Peer Gynt, you're as rude as an ox.
[*Weeping.*
Is it my fault if no longer I'm fair,
As I was when you lured me on hillside and lea?
Last fall, in my labour, the Fiend held my back,
And so 'twas no wonder I came out a fright.
But if you would see me as fair as before,
You have only to turn yonder girl out of doors,
Drive her clean out of your sight and your mind;—
Do but this, dear my love, and I'll soon lose my snout

PEER.

Begone from me, troll-witch!

THE WOMAN.

Ay, see if I do!

PEER.

I'll split your skull open——!

THE WOMAN.

Just try if you dare!
Ho-ho, Peer Gynt, I've no fear of blows!
Be sure I'll return every day of the year.
Through the door, set ajar, I'll peep in at you both.
When you're sitting with your girl on the fireside bench,—
When you're tender, Peer Gynt,—when you'd pet and caress her,—
I'll seat myself by you, and ask for my share.
She there and I—we will take you by turns.
Farewell, dear my lad, you can marry to-morrow!

PEER.

You nightmare of hell!

THE WOMAN.

By-the-bye, I forgot!
You must rear your own youngster, you light-footed scamp!
Little imp, will you go to your father?

THE BRAT.

[*Spits at him.*]

Faugh!
I'll chop you with my hatchet; only wait, only wait!

THE WOMAN.

[*Kisses* THE BRAT.]

What a head he has got on his shoulders, the dear!
You'll be dad's living image when once you're a man!

PEER.

[*Stamping.*]

Oh, would you were as far——!

THE WOMAN.

As we now are near?

PEER.

[*Clenching his hands.*]

And all this——!

THE WOMAN.

For nothing but thoughts and desires!
It is hard on you, Peer!

PEER.

It is worst for another!—
Solveig, my fairest, my purest gold!

THE WOMAN.

Oh ay, 'tis the guiltless must smart, said the devil:
His mother boxed his ears when his father was drunk!

[*She trudges off into the thicket with* THE BRAT, *who throws the flagon at* PEER GYNT.

PEER.

[*After a long silence.*]

The Boyg said, "Go roundabout!"—so one must here.—
There fell my fine palace, with crash and clatter!

There's a wall around her whom I stood so near,
Of a sudden all's ugly—my joy has grown old.—
Roundabout, lad! There's no way to be found
Right through all this, from where you stand to her.
Right through? H'm, surely there should be one
There's a text on repentance, unless I mistake.
But what? What is it? I haven't the book,
I've forgotten it mostly, and here there is none
That can guide me aright in the pathless wood.—
Repentance? And maybe 'twould take whole years
Ere I fought my way through. 'Twere a meagre life, that.
To shatter what's radiant, and lovely, and pure,
And clinch it together in fragments and shards?
You can do it with a fiddle, but not with a bell.
Where you'd have the sward green, you must mind not to trample.
'Twas nought but a lie though, that witch-snout business!
Now all that foulness is well out of sight.—
Ay, out of sight maybe, but not out of mind.
Thoughts will sneak stealthily in at my heel.
Ingrid! And the three, they that danced on the heights!
Will they too want to join us? With vixenish spite
Will they claim to be folded, like her, to my breast,
To be tenderly lifted on outstretched arms?
Roundabout, lad; though my arms were as long
As the root of the fir, or the pine-tree's stem,—
I think even then I should hold her too near
To set her down pure and untarnished again.—
I must roundabout here, then, as best I may,
And see that it bring me nor gain nor loss.
One must put such things from one, and try to forget.—

[*Goes a few steps towards the hut, but stops again.*

Go in after this? So befouled and disgraced?
Go in with that troll-rabble after me still?
Speak, yet be silent; confess, yet conceal——?
[*Throws away his axe.*
It's a holy-day evening. For me to keep tryst,
Such as now I am, would be sacrilege.

SOLVEIG.

[*In the doorway.*]
Are you coming?

PEER.

[*Half aloud.*]
Roundabout!

SOLVEIG.

What?

PEER.

You must wait.
It is dark, and I've got something heavy to fetch.

SOLVEIG.

Wait; I will help you; the burden we'll share.

PEER.

No, stay where you are! I must bear it alone.

SOLVEIG.

But don't go too far, dear!

PEER.

Be patient, my girl;
Be my way long or short—you must wait.

SOLVEIG.

[*Nodding to him as he goes.*]

Yes, I'll wait.

[PEER GYNT *goes down the wood-path.* SOLVEIG *remains standing in the open half-door.*

SCENE FOURTH

ÅSE'S *room. Evening. The room is lighted by a wood fire on the open hearth. A cat is lying on a chair at the foot of the bed.*

ÅSE *lies in the bed, fumbling about restlessly with her hands on the coverlet.*

ÅSE.

Oh, Lord my God, isn't he coming?
The time drags so drearily on.
I have no one to send with a message;
And I've much, oh so much, to say.
I haven't a moment to lose now!
So quickly! Who could have foreseen!
Oh me, if I only were certain
I'd not been too strict with him!

PEER GYNT.

[*Enters.*]

Good evening!

ÅSE.

The Lord give you gladness!
You've come then, my boy, my dear!

But how dare you show face in the valley?
You know your life's forfeit here.

PEER.

Oh, life must e'en go as it may go;
I felt that I must look in.

ÅSE.

Ay, now Kari is put to silence,
And I can depart in peace!

PEER.

Depart? Why, what are you saying?
Where is it you think to go?

ÅSE.

Alas, Peer, the end is nearing;
I have but a short time left.

PEER.

[*Writhing, and walking towards the back of the room.*]

See there now! I'm fleeing from trouble;
I thought at least h e r e I'd be free——!
Are your hands and your feet a-cold, then?

ÅSE.

Ay, Peer; all will soon be o'er.—
When you see that my eyes are glazing,
You must close them carefully.
And then you must see to my coffin;
And be sure it's a fine one, dear.
Ah no, by-the-bye——

PEER.

Be quiet!
There's time yet to think of that.

ÅSE.

Ay, ay. [*Looks restlessly round the room.*
Here you see the little
They've left us! It's like them, just.

PEER.

[*With a writhe.*]

Again! [*Harshly.*
Well, I know it was my fault.
What's the use of reminding me?

ÅSE.

You! No, that accursed liquor,
From that all the mischief came!
Dear my boy, you know you'd been drinking;
And then no one knows what he does;
And besides, you'd been riding the reindeer;
No wonder your head was turned!

PEER.

Ay, ay; of that yarn enough now.
Enough of the whole affair.
All that's heavy we'll let stand over
Till after—some other day.
[*Sits on the edge of the bed.*
Now, mother, we'll chat together;

But only of this and that,—
Forget what's awry and crooked,
And all that is sharp and sore.—
Why see now, the same old pussy.
So she is alive then, still?

ÅSE.

She makes such a noise o' nights now;
You know what that bodes, my boy!

PEER.

[*Changing the subject.*]

What news is there here in the parish?

ÅSE.

[*Smiling.*]

There's somewhere about, they say,
A girl who would fain to the uplands——

PEER.

[*Hastily.*]

Mads Moen, is he content?

ÅSE.

They say that she hears and heeds not
The old people's prayers and tears.
You ought to look in and see them;—
You, Peer, might perhaps bring help——

PEER.

The smith, what's become of him now?

ÅSE.

Don't talk of that filthy smith.
Her name I would rather tell you,
The name of the girl, you know——

PEER.

Nay, now we will chat together,
But only of this and that,—
Forget what's awry and crooked,
And all that is sharp and sore.
Are you thirsty? I'll fetch you water.
Can you stretch you? The bed is short.
Let me see;—if I don't believe, now,
It's the bed that I had when a boy!
Do you mind, dear, how oft in the evenings
You sat at my bedside here,
And spread the fur-coverlet o'er me,
And sang many a lilt and lay?

ÅSE.

Ay, mind you? And then we played sledges,
When your father was far abroad.
The coverlet served for sledge-apron,
And the floor for an ice-bound fiord.

PEER.

Ah, but the best of all, though,—
Mother, you mind that too?
The best was the fleet-foot horses——

ÅSE.

Ay, think you that I've forgot?—
It was Kari's cat that we borrowed;
It sat on the log-scooped chair——

PEER.

To the castle west of the moon, and
The castle east of the sun,
To Soria-Moria Castle
The road ran both high and low.
A stick that we found in the closet,
For a whip-shaft you made it serve.

ÅSE.

Right proudly I perked on the box-seat——

PEER.

Ay, ay; you threw loose the reins,
And kept turning round as we travelled,
And asked me if I was cold.
God bless you, ugly old mother,—
You were ever a kindly soul——!
What's hurting you now?

ÅSE.

My back aches,
Because of the hard, bare boards.

PEER.

Stretch yourself; I'll support you.
There now, you're lying soft.

ÅSE.

[*Uneasily.*]

No, Peer, I'd be moving!

PEER.

Moving?

ÅSE.

Ay, moving; 'tis ever my wish.

PEER.

Oh, nonsense! Spread o'er you the bed-fur.
Let me sit at your bedside here.
There; now we'll shorten the evening
With many a lilt and lay.

ÅSE.

Best bring from the closet the prayer-book:
I feel so uneasy of soul.

PEER.

In Soria-Moria Castle
The King and the Prince give a feast.
On the sledge-cushions lie and rest you;
I'll drive you there over the heath——

ÅSE.

But, Peer dear, am I invited?

PEER.

Ay, that we are, both of us.
[*He throws a string round the back of the chair on which the cat is lying, takes up a stick, and seats himself at the foot of the bed.*
Gee-up! Will you stir yourself, Black-boy?
Mother, you're not a-cold?
Ay, ay; by the pace one knows it,
When Granë [1] begins to go!

ÅSE.

Why, Peer, what is it that's ringing——?

PEER.

The glittering sledge-bells, dear!

ÅSE.

Oh, mercy, how hollow it's rumbling.

PEER.

We're just driving over a fiord.

ÅSE.

I'm afraid! What is that I hear rushing
And sighing so strange and wild?

[1] Granë (Grani) was the name of Sigurd Fafnirsbane's horse, descended from Odin's Sleipnir. Sigurd's Granë was grey; Peer Gynt calls his "Svarten," Black-boy, or Blackey.—See the "Volsunga Saga," translated by Morris and Magnussen. Camelot edition, p. 43.

PEER.

It's the sough of the pine-trees, mother,
On the heath. Do you but sit still.

ÅSE.

There's a sparkling and gleaming afar now;
Whence comes all that blaze of light?

PEER.

From the castle's windows and doorways.
Don't you hear, they are dancing?

ÅSE.

Yes.

PEER.

Outside the door stands St. Peter,
And prays you to enter in.

ÅSE.

Does he greet us?

PEER.

He does, with honour,
And pours out the sweetest wine.

ÅSE.

Wine! Has he cakes as well, Peer?

PEER.

Cakes? Ay, a heaped-up dish.
And the dean's wife [1] is getting ready
Your coffee and your dessert.

[1] "Salig provstinde," literally "the late Mrs. Provost."

ÅSE.

Lord, Lord! shall we two come together?

PEER.

As freely as ever you will.

ÅSE.

Oh, deary, Peer, what a frolic
You're driving me to, poor soul!

PEER.

[*Cracking his whip.*]

Gee-up; will you stir yourself, Black-boy!

ÅSE.

Peer, dear, you're driving right?

PEER.

[*Cracking his whip again.*]

Ay, broad is the way.

ÅSE.

This journey,
It makes me so weak and tired.

PEER.

There's the castle rising before us;
The drive will be over soon.

ÅSE.

I will lie back and close my eyes then,
And trust me to you, my boy!

PEER.

Come up with you, Granë, my trotter!
In the castle the throng is great;
They bustle and swarm to the gateway:
Peer Gynt and his mother are here!
What say you, Master Saint Peter?
Shall mother not enter in?
You may search a long time, I tell you,
Ere you find such an honest old soul.
Myself I don't want to speak of;
I can turn at the castle gate.
If you'll treat me, I'll take it kindly;
If not, I'll go off just as pleased.
I have made up as many flim-flams
As the devil at the pulpit desk,
And called my old mother a hen, too,
Because she would cackle and crow.
But her you shall honour and reverence,
And make her at home indeed;
There comes not a soul to beat her
From the parishes nowadays.—
Ho-ho; here comes God the Father!
Saint Peter! you're in for it now! [*In a deep voice.*
"Have done with these jack-in-office airs, sir;
Mother Åse shall enter free!"
[*Laughs loudly, and turns towards his mother.*
Ay, didn't I know what would happen?
Now they dance to another tune! [*Uneasily.*
Why, what makes your eyes so glassy?

Mother! Have you gone out of your wits——?
[*Goes to the head of the bed.*
You mustn't lie there and stare so——!
Speak, mother; it's I, your boy!
[*Feels her forehead and hands cautiously; then throws the string on the chair, and says softly:*
Ay, ay!—You can rest yourself, Granë;
For e'en now the journey's done.
[*Closes her eyes, and bends over her.*
For all of your days I thank you,
For beatings and lullabys!
But see, you must thank me back, now—
[*Presses his cheek against her mouth.*
There; that was the driver' fare.[1]

THE COTTAR'S WIFE.

[*Entering.*]

What? Peer! Ah, then we are over
The worst of the sorrow and need!
Dear Lord, but she's sleeping soundly—
Or can she be——?

PEER.

Hush; she is dead.

[KARI *weeps beside the body;* PEER GYNT *walks up and down the room for some time; at last he stops beside the bed.*

PEER.

See mother buried with honour.
I must try to fare forth from here.

[1] *Tak for skyds*, literally "thanks for the drive."

KARI.

Are you faring afar?

PEER.

To seaward.

KARI.

So far!

PEER.

Ay, and further still. [*He goes.*

ACT FOURTH

SCENE FIRST

On the south-west coast of Morocco. A palm-grove. Under an awning, on ground covered with matting, a table spread for dinner. Further back in the grove hammocks are slung. In the offing lies a steam-yacht, flying the Norwegian and American colours. A jolly-boat drawn up on the beach. It is towards sunset.

PEER GYNT, *a handsome middle-aged gentleman, in an elegant travelling-dress, with a gold-rimmed double eyeglass hanging at his waistcoat, is doing the honours at the head of the table.* MR. COTTON,[1] MONSIEUR BALLON, HERR VON EBERKOPF, *and* HERR TRUMPETERSTRÅLE,[2] *are seated at the table finishing dinner.*

PEER GYNT.

Drink, gentlemen! If man is made
For pleasure, let him take his fill then.
You know 'tis written: Lost is lost,
And gone is gone——. What may I hand you?

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

As host you're princely, Brother Gynt!

[1] In the original, "Master Cotton."
[2] A Swede. The name means "trumpet-blast."

PEER.

I share the honour with my cash,
With cook and steward——

MR. COTTON.

Very well; [1]
Let's pledge a toast to all the four!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Monsieur,[2] you have a *gout*,[2] a *ton*,[2]
That nowadays is seldom met with
Among men living *en garçon*,— [2]
A certain—what's the word——?

VON EBERKOPF.

A dash,
A tinge of free soul-contemplation,
And cosmopolitanisation,[3]
An outlook through the cloudy rifts
By narrow prejudice unhemmed,
A stamp of high illumination,
An *Ur-Natur*,[2] with lore of life,
To crown the trilogy, united.
Nicht wahr, Monsieur, 'twas that you meant?

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Yes, very possible; not quite
So loftily it sounds in French.

[1] In the original (early editions), "Werry well."
[2] So in original.
[3] This may not be a very lucid or even very precise rendering of *Verdensborgerdomsforpagtning;* but this line, and indeed the whole speech, is pure burlesque; and the exact sense of nonsense is naturally elusive.

VON EBERKOPF.

Ei was! [1] That language is so stiff.—
But the phenomenon's final cause
If we would seek——

PEER.

It's found already.
The reason is that I'm unmarried.
Yes, gentlemen, completely clear
The matter is. What should a man be?
H i m s e l f, is my concise reply.
He should regard h i m s e l f and h i s.
But can he, as a sumpter-mule [2]
For others' woe and others' weal?

VON EBERKOPF.

But this same in-and-for-yourself-ness,
I'll answer for't, has cost you strife——

PEER.

Ah yes, indeed; in former days;
But always I came off with honour.
Yet one time I ran very near
To being trapped against my will.
I was a brisk and handsome lad,
And she to whom my heart was given,
She was of royal family——

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Of royal——?

[1] So in original.
[2] Literally, "pack-camel."

PEER.

[*Carelessly.*]

One of those old stocks,
You know the kind——

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

[*Thumping the table.*]

Those noble-trolls.

PEER.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*]

Old fossil Highnesses who make it
Their pride to keep plebeian blots
Excluded from their line's escutcheon.

MR. COTTON.

Then nothing came of the affair?

MONSIEUR BALLON.

The family opposed the marriage?

PEER.

Far from it!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Ah!

PEER.

[*With forbearance.*]

You understand
That certain circumstances made for
Their marrying us without delay.

But truth to tell, the whole affair
Was, first to last, distasteful to me.
I'm finical in certain ways,
And like to stand on my own feet.
And when my father-in-law came out
With delicately veiled demands
That I should change my name and station,
And undergo ennoblement,
With much else that was most distasteful,
Not to say quite inacceptable.—
Why then I gracefully withdrew,
Point-blank declined his ultimatum—
And so renounced my youthful bride.
[*Drums on the table with a devout air.*
Yes, yes; there is a ruling Fate!
On that we mortals may rely;
And 'tis a comfortable knowledge.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

And so the matter ended, eh?

PEER.

Oh no, far otherwise I found it;
For busy-bodies mixed themselves,
With furious outcries, in the business.
The juniors of the clan were worst;
With seven of them I fought a duel.
That time I never shall forget,
Though I came through it all in safety.
It cost me blood; but that same blood
Attests the value of my person,
And points encouragingly towards
The wise control of Fate aforesaid.

VON EBERKOPF.

Your outlook on the course of life
Exalts you to the rank of thinker.
Whilst the mere commonplace empiric
Sees separately the scattered scenes,
And to the last goes groping on,
You in one glance can focus all things.
One norm [1] to all things you apply.
You point each random rule of life,
Till one and all diverge like rays
From one full-orbed philosophy.—
And you have never been to college?

PEER.

I am, as I've already said,
Exclusively a self-taught man.
Methodically naught I've learned;
But I have thought and speculated,
And done much desultory reading.
I started somewhat late in life,
And then, you know, it's rather hard
To plough ahead through page on page,
And take in all of everything.
I've done my history piecemeal;
I never have had time for more.
And, as one needs in days of trial
Some certainty to place one's trust in,
I took religion intermittently.
That way it goes more smoothly down.
One should not read to swallow all,
But rather see what one has use for.

[1] So in original.

MR. COTTON.

Ay, that is practical!

PEER.

[*Lights a cigar.*]

Dear friends
Just think of my career in general.
In what case came I to the West?
A poor young fellow, empty-handed;
I had to battle sore for bread;
Trust me, I often found it hard.
But life, my friends, ah, life is dear,
And, as the phrase goes, death is bitter.
Well! Luck, you see, was kind to me;
Old Fate, too, was accommodating.
I prospered; and, by versatility,
I prospered better still and better.
In ten years' time I bore the name
Of Crœsus 'mongst the Charleston shippers.
My fame flew wide from port to port,
And fortune sailed on board my vessels——

MR. COTTON.

What did you trade in?

PEER.

I did most
In negro slaves for Carolina,
And idol-images for China.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Fi donc! [1]

[1] So in original.

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

The devil, Uncle Gynt!

PEER.

You think, no doubt, the business hovered
On the outer verge of the allowable?
Myself I felt the same thing keenly.
It struck me even as odious.
But, trust me, when you've once begun,
It's hard to break away again.
At any rate it's no light thing,
In such a vast trade-enterprise,
That keeps whole thousands in employ,
To break off wholly, once for all.
That "once for all" I can't abide,
But own, upon the other side,
That I have always felt respect
For what are known as consequences;
And that to overstep the bounds
Has ever somewhat daunted me.
Besides, I had begun to age.
Was getting on towards the fifties;—
My hair was slowly growing grizzled;
And, though my health was excellent,
Yet painfully the thought beset me:
Who knows how soon the hour may strike,
The jury-verdict be delivered
That parts the sheep and goats asunder?
What could I do? To stop the trade
With China was impossible.
A plan I hit on—opened straightway
A new trade with the self-same land.
I shipped off idols every spring,

Each autumn sent forth missionaries,
Supplying them with all they needed,
As stockings, Bibles, rum, and rice——

MR. COTTON.

Yes, at a profit?

PEER.

Why, of course.
It prospered. Dauntlessly they toiled.
For every idol that was sold
They got a coolie well baptised,
So that the effect was neutralised.
The mission-field lay never fallow,
For still the idol-propaganda
The missionaries held in check.

MR. COTTON.

Well, but the African commodities?

PEER.

There, too, my ethics won the day.
I saw the traffic was a wrong one
For people of a certain age.
One may drop off before one dreams of it.
And then there were the thousand pitfalls
Laid by the philanthropic camp;
Besides, of course, the hostile cruisers,
And all the wind-and-weather risks.
All this together won the day.
I thought: Now, Peter,[1] reef your sails;
See to it you amend your faults!

[1] So in original.

So in the South I bought some land,
And kept the last meat-importation,
Which chanced to be a superfine one.
They throve so, grew so fat and sleek,
That 'twas a joy to me, and them too.
Yes, without boasting, I may say
I acted as a father to them,—
And found my profit in so doing.
I built them schools, too, so that virtue
Might uniformly be maintained at
A certain general *niveau*,[1]
And kept strict watch that never its
Thermometer should sink below it.
Now, furthermore, from all this business
I've beat a definite retreat;—
I've sold the whole plantation, and
Its tale of live-stock, hide and hair.
At parting, too, I served around,
To big and little, gratis grog,[1]
So men and women all got drunk,
And widows got their snuff as well.
So that is why I trust,—provided
The saying is not idle breath:
Whoso does not do ill, does good,—
My former errors are forgotten,
And I, much more than most, can hold
My misdeeds balanced by my virtues.

VON EBERKOPF.

[*Clinking glasses with him.*]

How strengthening it is to hear
A principle thus acted out,

[1] So in original.

Freed from the night of theory,
Unshaken by the outward ferment!

PEER.

[*Who has been drinking freely during the preceding passages.*]

We Northland men know how to carry
Our battle through! The key to the art
Of life's affairs is simply this:
To keep one's ear close shut against
The ingress of one dangerous viper.

MR. COTTON.

What sort of viper, pray, dear friend?

PEER.

A little one that slyly wiles you
To tempt the irretrievable. [*Drinking again.*
The essence of the art of daring,
The art of bravery in act,
Is this: To stand with choice-free foot
Amid the treacherous snares of life,—
To know for sure that other days
Remain beyond the day of battle,—
To know that ever in the rear
A bridge for your retreat stands open.
This theory has borne me on,
Has given my whole career its colour;
And this same theory I inherit,
A race-gift, from my childhood's home.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

You are Norwegian?

PEER.

Yes, by birth;
But cosmopolitan in spirit.
For fortune such as I've enjoyed
I have to thank America.
My amply-furnished library
I owe to Germany's later schools.
From France, again, I get my waistcoats,
My manners, and my spice of wit,—
From England an industrious hand,
And keen sense for my own advantage.
The Jew has taught me how to wait.
Some taste for *dolce far niente* [1]
I have received from Italy,—
And one time, in a perilous pass,
To eke the measure of my days,
I had recourse to Swedish steel.

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

[*Lifting up his glass.*]

Ay, Swedish steel——?

VON EBERKOPF.

The weapon's wielder
Demands our homage first of all!

[*They clink glasses and drink with him. The wine begins to go to his head.*

MR. COTTON.

All this is very good indeed;—
But, sir,[1] I'm curious to know
What with your gold you think of doing.

[1] So in original.

PEER.

[*Smiling.*]

H'm; doing? Eh?

ALL FOUR.

[*Coming closer.*]

Yes, let us hear!

PEER.

Well, first of all, I want to travel.
You see, that's why I shipped you four,
To keep me company, at Gibraltar.
I needed such a dancing-choir
Of friends around my gold-calf-altar——

VON EBERKOPF.

Most witty!

MR. COTTON.

Well, but no one hoists
His sails for nothing but the sailing.
Beyond all doubt, you have a goal;
And that is——?

PEER.

To be Emperor.[1]

ALL FOUR.

What?

PEER.

[*Nodding.*]

Emperor!

[1] In the original "kejser." We have elsewhere used the word "Kaiser," but in this scene, and in Scenes 7 and 8 of this act, the ordinary English form seemed preferable.

THE FOUR.

Where?

PEER.

O'er all the world.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

But how, friend——?

PEER.

By the might of gold!
That plan is not at all a new one;
It's been the soul of my career.
Even as a boy, I swept in dreams
Far o'er the ocean on a cloud.
I soared with train and golden scabbard,—
And flopped down on all-fours again.
But still my goal, my friends, stood fast.—
There is a text, or else a saying,
Somewhere, I don't remember where,
That if you gained the whole wide world,
But lost y o u r s e l f, your gain were but
A garland on a cloven skull.
That is the text—or something like it;
And that remark is sober truth.

VON EBERKOPF.

But what then is the Gyntish Self?

PEER.

The world behind my forehead's arch,
By force of which I'm no one else
Than I, no more than God's the Devil.

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

I understand now where you're aiming!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Thinker sublime!

VON EBERKOPF.

Exalted poet!

PEER.

[*More and more elevated.*]

The Gyntish Self—it is the host
Of wishes, appetites, desires,—
The Gyntish Self, it is the sea
Of fancies, exigencies, claims,
All that, in short, makes m y breast heave,
And whereby I, as I, exist.
But as our Lord requires the clay
To constitute him God o' the world,
So I, too, stand in need of gold,
If I as Emperor would figure.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

You have the gold, though?

PEER.

Not enough.
Ay, maybe for a nine-days' flourish,
As Emperor *à la* [1] Lippe-Detmold.
But I must be myself *en bloc*,[1]
Must be the Gynt of all the planet,
Sir Gynt [1] throughout, from top to bottom!

[1] So in original.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

[*Enraptured.*]

Possess the earth's most exquisite beauty!

VON EBERKOPF.

All century-old Johannisberger!

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

And all the blades of Charles the Twelfth!

MR. COTTON.

But first a profitable opening
For business——

PEER.

That's already found;
Our anchoring here supplied me with it.
To night we set off, northward ho!
The papers I received on board
Have brought me tidings of importance——!
[*Rises with uplifted glass.*
It seems that Fortune ceaselessly
Aids him who has the pluck to seize it——

THE GUESTS.

Well? Tell us——!

PEER.

Greece is in revolt.

ALL FOUR.

[*Springing up.*]

What! Greece——?

PEER.

The Greeks have risen in Hellas.

THE FOUR.

Hurrah!

PEER.

And Turkey's in a fix! [*Empties his glass.*

MONSIEUR BALLON.

To Hellas! Glory's gate stands open!
I'll help them with the sword of France!

VON EBERKOPF.

And I with war-whoops—from a distance.

MR. COTTON.

And I as well—by taking contracts!

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

Lead on! I'll find again in Bender
The world-renownëd spur-strap-buckles![1]

MONSIEUR BALLON.

[*Falling on* PEER GYNT'S *neck.*]

Forgive me, friend, that I at first
Misjudged you quite!

[1] An allusion to the spurs with which Charles XII. is said to have torn the caftan of the Turkish Vizier who announced to him that the Sultan had concluded a truce with Russia. The boots and spurs, it would appear, have been preserved, but with the buckles missing.

VON EBERKOPF.

[*Pressing his hands.*]

I, stupid hound,
Took you for next door to a scoundrel!

MR. COTTON.

Too strong that; only for a fool——

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

[*Trying to kiss him.*]

I, Uncle, for a specimen
Of Yankee riff-raff's meanest spawn——!
Forgive me——!

VON EBERKOPF.

We've been in the dark——

PEER.

What stuff is this?

VON EBERKOPF.

We now see gathered
In glory all the Gyntish host
Of wishes, appetites, and desires——!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

[*Admiringly.*]

So t h i s is being Monsieur [1] Gynt!

VON EBERKOPF.

[*In the same tone.*]

This I call being Gynt with honour!

[1] So in original.

PEER.

But tell me——?

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Don't you understand?

PEER.

May I be hanged if I begin to!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

What? Are you not upon your way
To join the Greeks, with ship and money——?

PEER.

[*Contemptuously.*]

No, many thanks! I side with strength,
And lend my money to the Turks.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Impossible!

VON EBERKOPF.

Witty, but a jest!

PEER.

[*After a short silence, leaning on a chair and assuming a dignified mien.*]

Come, gentlemen, I think it best
We part before the last remains
Of friendship melt away like smoke.
Who nothing owns will lightly risk it.
When in the world one scarce commands

The strip of earth one's shadow covers,
One's born to serve as food for powder.
But when a man stands safely landed,
As I do, then his stake is greater.
Go you to Hellas. I will put you
Ashore, and arm you gratis too.
The more you eke the flames of strife,
The better will it serve my purpose.
Strike home for freedom and for right!
Fight! storm! make hell hot for the Turks;—
And gloriously end your days
Upon the Janissaries' lances.—
But I—excuse me—— [*Slaps his pocket.*
I have cash,
And am myself, Sir Peter Gynt.[1]

[*Puts up his sunshade, and goes into the grove, where the hammocks are partly visible.*

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

The swinish cur!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

No taste for glory——!

MR. COTTON.

Oh, glory's neither here nor there;
But think of the enormous profits
We'd reap if Greece should free herself!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

I saw myself a conqueror,
By lovely Grecian maids encircled!

[1] So in original.

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

Grasped in my Swedish hands, I saw
The great, heroic spur-strap-buckles!

VON EBERKOPF.

I my gigantic Fatherland's
Culture saw spread o'er earth and sea——!

MR. COTTON.

The worst's the loss in solid cash.
God dam![1] I scarce can keep from weeping!
I saw me owner of Olympus.
If to its fame the mountain answers,
There must be veins of copper in it,
That could be opened up again.
And furthermore, that stream Castalia,[2]
Which people talk so much about,
With fall on fall, at lowest reckoning,
Must mean a thousand horse-power good——

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

Still I will go! My Swedish sword
Is worth far more than Yankee gold!

MR. COTTON.

Perhaps; but, jammed into the ranks,
Amid the press we'd all be drowned;
And then where would the profit be?

[1] So in original.
[2] Mr. Cotton seems to have confounded Olympus with Parnassus.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Accurst! So near to fortune's summit,
And now stopped short beside its grave!

MR. COTTON.

[*Shakes his fist towards the yacht.*]

That long black chest holds coffered up
The nabob's golden nigger-sweat——!

VON EBERKOPF.

A royal notion! Quick! Away!
It's all up with his empire now!
Hurrah!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

What would you?

VON EBERKOPF.

Seize the power!
The crew can easily be bought.
On board then. I annex the yacht!

MR. COTTON.

You—what——?

VON EBERKOPF.

I grab the whole concern!
[*Goes down to the jolly-boat.*

MR. COTTON.

Why then self-interest commands me
To grab my share. [*Goes after him.*

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

What scoundrelism!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

A scurvy business—but—*enfin!* [1] [*Follows the others.*

TRUMPETERSTRÅLE.

I'll have to follow, I suppose,—
But I protest to all the world——! [2] [*Follows.*

SCENE SECOND

Another part of the coast. Moonlight with drifting clouds. The yacht is seen far out, under full steam.

PEER GYNT *comes running along the beach; now pinching his arms, now gazing out to sea.*

PEER.

A nightmare!—Delusion!—I'll soon be awake!
She's standing to sea! And at furious speed!—
Mere delusion! I'm sleeping! I'm dizzy and drunk!
[*Clenches his hands.*
It's not possible I should be going to die!
[*Tearing his hair.*
A dream! I'm determined it shall be a dream!
Oh, horror! It's only too real, worse luck!
My brute-beasts of friends——! Do but hear me, oh Lord!

[1] So in original.

[2] An allusion to the attitude of Sweden during the Danish War of 1863–64, with special reference to the diplomatic notes of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Grev Manderström. He is also aimed at in the character of Hussein in the last scene of this act. See Introduction.

Since though art so wise and so righteous——! Oh judge——! [*With upstretched arms.*
It is *I*, Peter [1] Gynt! Oh, our Lord, give but heed!
Hold thy hand o'er me, Father; or else I must perish!
Make them back the machine! Make them lower the gig!
Stop the robbers! Make something go wrong with the rigging!
Hear me! Let other folks' business lie over!
The world can take care of itself for the time!—
I'm blessed if he hears me! He's deaf as his wont is!
Here's a nice thing! A God that is bankrupt of help!
[*Beckons upwards.*
Hist; I've abandoned the nigger-plantation!
And missionaries I've exported to Asia!
Surely one good turn should be worth another!
Oh, help me on board——!

[*A jet of fire shoots into the air from the yacht, followed by thick clouds of smoke; a hollow report is heard.* PEER GYNT *utters a shriek, and sinks down on the sands. Gradually the smoke clears away; the ship has disappeared.*

PEER.

[*Softly, with a pale face.*]

That's the sword of wrath!
In a crack to the bottom, every soul, man and mouse!
Oh, for ever blest be the lucky chance——
[*With emotion.*
A chance? No, no, it was more than a chance.
I was to be rescued and they to perish.
Oh, thanks and praise for that thou hast kept me,

[1] So in original.

Hast cared for me, spite of all my sins!—
[*Draws a deep breath.*
What a marvellous feeling of safety and peace
It gives one to know oneself specially shielded!
But the desert! What about food and drink?
Oh, something I'm sure to find. H e ' l l see to that.
There's no cause for alarm:— [*Loud and insinuatingly.*
H e would never allow
A poor little sparrow like me to perish!
Be but lowly of spirit. And give him time.
Leave it all in the Lord's hands; and don't be cast down.— [*With a start of terror.*
Can that be a lion that growled in the reeds——?
[*His teeth chattering.*
No, it wasn't a lion. [*Mustering up courage.*
A lion, forsooth!
Those beasts, they'll take care to keep out of the way.
They know it's no joke to fall foul of their betters.
They have instinct to guide them;—they feel, what's a fact,
That it's dangerous playing with elephants.—
But all the same.—— I must find a tree.
There's a grove of acacias and palms over there;
If I once can climb up, I'll he sheltered and safe,—
Most of all if I knew but a psalm or two.
[*Clambers up.*
Morning and evening are not alike;
That text has been oft enough weighed and pondered.
[*Seats himself comfortably.*
How blissful to feel so uplifted in spirit!
To think nobly is more than to know oneself rich.
Only trust in Him. He knows well what share
Of the chalice of need I can bear to drain.
He takes fatherly thought for my personal weal;—

[*Casts a glance over the sea, and whispers with a sigh:*
But economical—no, that he isn't!

SCENE THIRD

Night. An encampment of Moroccan troops on the edge of the desert. Watch-fires, with SOLDIERS *resting by them.*

A SLAVE.

[*Enters, tearing his hair.*]

Gone is the Emperor's milk-white charger!

ANOTHER SLAVE.

[*Enters, rending his garments.*]

The Emperor's sacred robes are stolen!

AN OFFICER.

[*Enters.*]

A hundred stripes upon the foot-soles
For all who fail to catch the robber!

[*The troopers mount their horses, and gallop away in every direction.*

SCENE FOURTH

Daybreak. The grove of acacias and palms.
PEER GYNT *in his tree with a broken branch in his hand, trying to beat off a swarm of monkeys.*

PEER.

Confound it! A most disagreeable night.

[*Laying about him.*

Are you there again? This is most accursëd!
Now they're throwing fruit. No, it's something else.
A loathsome beast is your Barbary ape!
The Scripture says: Thou shalt watch and fight.
But I'm blest if I can; I am heavy and tired,
[*Is again attacked; impatiently:*
I must put a stopper upon this nuisance!
I must see and get hold of one of these scamps,
Get him hung and skinned, and then dress myself up,
As best I may, in his shaggy hide,
That the others may take me for one of themselves.—
What are we mortals? Motes, no more;
And it's wisest to follow the fashion a bit.—
Again a rabble! They throng and swarm.
Off with you! Shoo! They go on as though crazy.
If only I had a false tail to put on now,—
Only something to make me a bit like a beast.—
What now? There's a pattering over my head——!
[*Looks up.*
It's the grandfather ape,—with his fists full of filth——!
[*Huddles together apprehensively, and keeps still for a while. The ape makes a motion;* PEER GYNT *begins coaxing and wheedling him, as he might a dog.*
Ay,—are you there, my good old Bus!
He's a good beast, he is! He will listen to reason!
He wouldn't throw;—I should think not, indeed!
It is me! Pip-pip! We are first-rate friends!
Ai-ai! Don't you hear, I can talk your language?
Bus and I, we are kinsfolk, you see;—
Bus shall have sugar to-morrow——! The beast!
The whole cargo on top of me! Ugh, how disgusting!—
Or perhaps it was food! 'Twas in taste—indefinable;
And taste's for the most part a matter of habit.

What thinker is it who somewhere says:
You must spit and trust to the force of habit?—
Now here come the small-fry!

[*Hits and slashes around him.*

It's really too bad
That man, who by rights is the lord of creation,
Should find himself forced to——! O murder! murder!
The old one was bad, but the youngsters are worse!

SCENE FIFTH

Early morning. A stony region, with a view out over the desert. On one side a cleft in the hill, and a cave.

A THIEF *and a* RECEIVER *hidden in the cleft, with the Emperor's horse and robes. The horse, richly caparisoned, is tied to a stone. Horsemen are seen afar off.*

THE THIEF.

The tongues of the lances
All flickering and flashing,—
See, see!

THE RECEIVER.

Already my head seems
To roll on the sand-plain!
Woe, woe!

THE THIEF.

[*Folds his arms over his breast.*]

My father he thieved;
So his son must be thieving.

THE RECEIVER.

My father received;
Still his son is receiving.[1]

THE THIEF.

Thy lot shalt thou bear still;
Thyself shalt thou be still.

THE RECEIVER.

[*Listening.*]

Steps in the brushwood!
Flee, flee! But where?

THE THIEF.

The cavern is deep,
And the Prophet great!

[*They make off, leaving the booty behind them. The horsemen gradually disappear in the distance.*

PEER GYNT.

[*Enters, cutting a reed whistle.*]

What a delectable morning-tide!—
The dung-beetle's rolling his ball in the dust;
The snail creeps out of his dwelling-house.
The morning; ay, it has gold in its mouth.—
It's a wonderful power, when you think of it,
That Nature has given to the light of day.
One feels so secure, and so much more courageous,—
One would gladly, at need, take a bull by the horns.—

[1] This is not to be taken as a burlesque instance of the poet's supposed preoccupation with questions of heredity, but simply as an allusion to the fact that, in the East, thieving and receiving are regular and hereditary professions.

What a stillness all round! Ah, the joys of Nature,—
Strange enough I should never have prized them before.
Why go and imprison oneself in a city,
For no end but just to be bored by the mob.—
Just look how the lizards are whisking about,
Snapping, and thinking of nothing at all.
What innocence ev'n in the life of the beasts!
Each fulfils the Creator's behest unimpeachably,
Preserving its own special stamp undefaced;
Is itself, is itself, both in sport and in strife,
Itself, as it was at his primal: Be!

[*Puts on his eye-glasses.*

A toad. In the middle of a sandstone block.
Petrifaction all around him. His head alone peering.
There he's sitting and gazing as though through a window
At the world, and is—to himself enough.—

[*Reflectively.*

Enough? To himself——? Where is it that's written?
I've read it, in youth, in some so-called classic.
In the family prayer-book? Or Solomon's Proverbs?
Alas, I notice that, year by year,
My memory for dates and for places is fading.

[*Seats himself in the shade.*

Here's a cool spot to rest and to stretch out one's feet.
Why, look, here are ferns growing—edible roots.

[*Eats a little.*

'Twould be fitter food for an animal;—
But the text says: Bridle the natural man!
Furthermore it is written: The proud shall be humbled,
And whoso abaseth himself, exalted. [*Uneasily.*
Exalted? Yes, that's what will happen with me;—
No other result can so much as be thought of.
Fate will assist me away from this place,
And arrange matters so that I get a fresh start.

This is only a trial; deliverance will follow,—
If only the Lord let's me keep my health.
[*Dismisses his misgivings, lights a cigar, stretches himself, and gazes out over the desert.*
What an enormous, limitless waste!—
Far in the distance an ostrich is striding.—
What can one fancy was really God's
Meaning in all of this voidness and deadness?
This desert, bereft of all sources of life;
This burnt-up cinder, that profits no one;
This patch of the world, that for ever lies fallow;
This corpse, that never, since earth's creation,
Has brought its Maker so much as thanks,—
Why was it created?—How spendthrift is Nature!—
Is that sea in the east there, that dazzling expanse
All gleaming? It can't be; 'tis but a mirage.
The sea's to the west; it lies piled up behind me,
Dammed out from the desert by a sloping ridge.
[*A thought flashes through his mind.*
Dammed out? Then I could——? The ridge is narrow.
Dammed out? It wants but a gap, a canal,—
Like a flood of life would the waters rush
In through the channel, and fill the desert![1]
Soon would the whole of yon red-hot grave
Spread forth, a breezy and rippling sea.
The oases would rise in the midst, like islands;
Atlas would tower in green cliffs on the north;
Sailing-ships would, like stray birds on the wing,
Skim to the south, on the caravans' track.
Life-giving breezes would scatter the choking
Vapours, and dew would distil from the clouds.
People would build themselves town on town,

[1] This proposal was seriously mooted about ten years after the appearance of *Peer Gynt*.

And grass would grow green round the swaying palm-trees.
The southland, behind the Sahara's wall,
Would make a new seaboard for civilisation.
Steam would set Timbuctoo's factories spinning;
Bornu would be colonised apace;
The naturalist would pass safely through Habes
In his railway-car to the Upper Nile.
In the midst of my sea, on a fat oasis,
I will replant the Norwegian race;
The Dalesman's blood is next door to royal;
Arabic crossing will do the rest.
Skirting a bay, on a shelving strand,
I'll build the chief city, Peeropolis.
The world is decrepit! Now comes the turn
Of Gyntiana, my virgin land! [*Springs up.*
Had I but capital, soon 'twould be done.—
A gold key to open the gate of the sea!
A crusade against Death! The close-fisted old churl
Shall open the sack he lies brooding upon.
Men rave about freedom in every land;—
Like the ass in the ark, I will send forth a cry
O'er the world, and will baptize to liberty
The beautiful, thrall-bounden coasts that shall be.
I must on! To find capital, eastward or west!
My kingdom—well, half of it, say—for a horse!
[*The horse in the cleft neighs.*
A horse! Ay, and robes!—Jewels too,—and a sword!
[*Goes closer.*
It can't be! It is though——! But how? I have read,
I don't quite know where, that the will can move mountains;—
But how about moving a horse as well——?
Pooh! Here stands the horse, that's a matter of fact;—

For the rest, why, *ab esse ad posse*, et cetera.
[*Puts on the dress and looks down at it.*
Sir Peter—a Turk, too, from top to toe!
Well, one never knows what may happen to one.—
Gee-up, now, Granë, my trusty steed!
[*Mounts the horse.*
Gold-slipper stirrups beneath my feet!—
You may know the great by their riding-gear!
[*Gallops off into the desert.*

SCENE SIXTH

The tent of an Arab chief, standing alone on an oasis. PEER GYNT, *in his eastern dress, resting on cushions. He is drinking coffee, and smoking a long pipe.* ANITRA, *and a bevy of* GIRLS, *dancing and singing before him.*

CHORUS OF GIRLS.

The Prophet is come!
The Prophet, the Lord, the All-Knowing One,
To us, to us is he come,
O'er the sand-ocean riding!
The Prophet, the Lord, the Unerring One,
To us, to us is he comè,
O'er the sand-ocean sailing!
Wake the flute and the drum!
The Prophet, the Prophet, is come!

ANITRA.

His courser is white as the milk is
That streams in the rivers of Paradise.

Bend every knee! Bow every head!
His eyes are as bright-gleaming, mild-beaming stars.
Yet none earth-born endureth
The rays of those stars in their blinding splendour!
Through the desert he came.
Gold and pearl-drops sprang forth on his breast.
Where he rode there was light.
Behind him was darkness;
Behind him raged drought and the simoon.
He, the glorious one, came!
Through the desert he came,
Like a mortal apparelled.
Kaaba, Kaaba stands void;—
He himself hath proclaimed it!

CHORUS OF GIRLS.

Wake the flute and the drum!
The Prophet, the Prophet is come!

[*They continue the dance, to soft music.*

PEER.

I have read it in print—and the saying is true—
That no one's a prophet in his native land.—
This position is very much more to my mind
Than my life over there 'mong the Charleston merchants.
There was something hollow in the whole affair,
Something foreign at the bottom, something dubious behind it;—
I was never at home in their company,
Nor felt myself really one of the guild.
What tempted me into that galley at all?
To grub and grub in the bins of trade—
As I think it all over, I can't understand it;—

It h a p p e n e d so; that's the whole affair.—
To be oneself on a basis of gold
Is no better than founding one's house on the sand.
For your watch, and your ring, and the rest of your trappings,
The good people fawn on you, grovelling to earth;
They lift their hats to your jewelled breast-pin;
But your ring and your breast-pin are not your Person.—[1]
A prophet; ay, that is a clearer position.
At least one knows on what footing one stands.
If you make a success, it's y o u r s e l f that receives
The ovation, and not your pounds-sterling and shillings.[2]
One is what one is, and no nonsense about it;
One owes nothing to chance or to accident,
And needs neither licence nor patent to lean on.—
A prophet; ay, that is the thing for me.
And I slipped so utterly unawares into it,—
Just by coming galloping over the desert,
And meeting these children of nature *en route*.
The Prophet had come to them; so much was clear.
It was really not my intent to deceive——;
There's a difference 'twixt lies and oracular answers;
And then I can always withdraw again.
I'm in no way bound; it's a simple matter—;
The whole thing is private, so to speak;
I can go as I came; there's my horse ready saddled;
I am master, in short, of the situation.

ANITRA.

[*Approaching the tent-door.*]

Prophet and Master!

[1] Or "ego."
[2] In original, "Pundsterling og shilling."

PEER.

What would my slave?

ANITRA.

The sons of the desert await at thy tent-door;
They pray for the light of thy countenance——

PEER.

Stop!
Say in the distance I'd have them assemble;
Say from the distance I hear all their prayers.
Add that I suffer no menfolk in here!
Men, my child, are a worthless crew,—
Inveterate rascals you well may call them!
Anitra, you can't think how shamelessly
They have swind——I mean they have sinned, my child!—[1]
Well, enough now of that; you may dance for me, damsels!
The Prophet would banish the memories that gall him.

THE GIRLS.

[*Dancing.*]

The Prophet is good! The Prophet is grieving
For the ill that the sons of the dust have wrought!
The Prophet is mild; to his mildness be praises;
He opens to sinners his Paradise!

PEER.

[*His eyes following* ANITRA *during the dance.*]

Legs as nimble as drumsticks flitting.
She's a dainty morsel indeed, that wench!

[1] In the original, "De har snydt——hm; jeg mener syndet, mit barn!"

It's true she has somewhat extravagant contours,—
Not quite in accord with the norms of beauty.
But what is beauty? A mere convention,—
A coin made current by time and place.
And just the extravagant seems most attractive
When one of the normal has drunk one's fill.
In the law-bound one misses all intoxication.
Either plump to excess or excessively lean;
Either parlously young or portentously old;—
The medium is mawkish.—
Her feet—they are not altogether clean;
No more are her arms; in especial one of them.
But that is at bottom no drawback at all.
I should rather call it a qualification—
Anitra, come listen!

ANITRA.

[*Approaching.*]

Thy handmaiden hears!

PEER.

You are tempting, my daughter! The Prophet is touched.
If you don't believe me, then hear the proof;—
I'll make you a Houri in Paradise!

ANITRA.

Impossible, Lord!

PEER.

What? You think I am jesting?
I'm in sober earnest, as true as I live!

ANITRA.

But I haven't a soul.

PEER.

Then of course you must get one!

ANITRA.

How, Lord?

PEER.

Just leave m e alone for that;—
I shall look after your education.
No soul? Why, truly you're not over bright,
As the saying goes. I've observed it with pain.
But pooh! for a soul you can always find room.
Come here! let me measure your brain-pan, child.—
There is room, there is room, I was sure there was.
It's true you never will penetrate
Very deep; to a l a r g e soul you'll scarcely attain;—
But never you mind; it won't matter a bit;—
You'll have plenty to carry you through with credit——

ANITRA.

The Prophet is gracious——

PEER.

You hesitate? Speak!

ANITRA.

But I'd rather——

PEER.

Say on; don't waste time about it.

ANITRA.

I don't care so much about having a soul;—
Give me rather——

PEER.

What, child?

ANITRA.

[*Pointing to his turban.*]

That lovely opal!

PEER.

[*Enchanted, handing her the jewel.*]

Anitra! Anitra! true daughter of Eve!
I feel thee magnetic; for I am a man,
And, as a much-esteemed author has phrased it:
"Das Ewig-Weibliche ziehet uns an!" [1]

SCENE SEVENTH

A moonlight night. The palm-grove outside ANITRA'S *tent.*

PEER GYNT *is sitting beneath a tree, with an Arabian lute in his hands. His beard and hair are clipped; he looks considerably younger.*

PEER GYNT.

[*Plays and sings.*]

I double-locked my Paradise,
And took its key with me.
The north-wind bore me seaward ho!
While lovely women all forlorn
Wept on the ocean strand.

[1] In the previous edition we restored the exact wording of Goethe's line, "zieht uns hinan." We ought to have understood that the point of the speech lay in the misquotation.

Still southward, southward clove my keel
The salt sea-currents through.
Where palms were swaying proud and fair,
A garland round the ocean-bight,
I set my ship afire.

I climbed aboard the desert ship,
A ship on four stout legs.
It foamed beneath the lashing whip;—
Oh, catch me; I'm a flitting bird;—
I'm twittering on a bough!

Anitra, thou'rt the palm-tree's must;
That know I now full well!
Ay, even the Angora goat-milk cheese
Is scarcely half such dainty fare,
Anitra, ah, as thou!
[*He hangs the lute over his shoulder, and comes forward.*]
Stillness! Is the fair one listening?
Has she heard my little song?
Peeps she from behind the curtain,
Veil and so forth cast aside?—
Hush! A sound as though a cork
From a bottle burst amain!
Now once more! And yet again!
Love-sighs can it be? or songs?—
No, it is distinctly snoring.—
Dulcet strain! Anitra sleepeth!
Nightingale, thy warbling stay!
Every sort of woe betide thee,
If with gurgling trill thou darest—
But, as says the text: Let be!
Nightingale, thou art a singer;

Ah, even such an one am I.
He, like me, ensnares with music
Tender, shrinking little hearts.
Balmy night is made for music;
Music is our common sphere;
In the act of singing, we are
We, Peer Gynt and nightingale.
And the maiden's very sleeping
Is my passion's crowning bliss;—
For the lips protruded o'er the
Beaker yet untasted quite——
But she's coming, I declare!
After all, it's best she should.

ANITRA.

[*From the tent.*]

Master, call'st thou in the night?

PEER.

Yes indeed, the Prophet calls.
I was wakened by the cat
With a furious hunting-hubbub——

ANITRA.

Ah, not hunting-noises, Master;
It was something much, much worse.

PEER.

What, then, was't?

ANITRA.

Oh, spare me!

PEER.

Speak!

ANITRA.

Oh, I blush to——

PEER.

[*Approaching.*]

Was it, mayhap,
That which filled me so completely
When I let you have my opal?

ANITRA.

[*Horrified.*]

Liken thee, O earth's great treasure,
To a horrible old cat!

PEER.

Child, from passion's standpoint viewed,
May a tom-cat and a prophet
Come to very much the same.

ANITRA.

Master, jest like honey floweth
From thy lips.

PEER.

My little friend,
You, like other maidens, judge
Great men by their outsides only.
I am full of jest at bottom,
Most of all when we're alone.
I am forced by my position
To assume a solemn mask.
Duties of the day constrain me;
All the reckonings and worry

That I have with one and all,
Make me oft a cross-grained prophet;
But it's only from the tongue out.—
Fudge, avaunt! *En tête-à-tête*
I'm Peer—well, the man I am.
Hei, away now with the prophet;
Me, myself, you have me here!
[*Seats himself under a tree, and draws her to him.*
Come, Anitra, we will rest us
Underneath the palm's green fan-shade!
I'll lie whispering, you'll lie smiling;
Afterwards our rôles exchange we;
Then shall your lips, fresh and balmy,
To my smiling, passion whisper!

ANITRA.

[*Lies down at his feet.*]

All thy words are sweet as singing,
Though I understand but little.
Master, tell me, can thy daughter
Catch a soul by listening?

PEER.

Soul, and spirit's light and knowledge,
All in good time you shall have them.
When in east, on rosy streamers
Golden types print: Here is day,—
Then, my child, I'll give you lessons;
You'll be well brought up, no fear.
But, 'mid night's delicious stillness,
It were stupid if I should,
With a threadbare wisdom's remnants,
Play the part of pedagogue.—

And the soul, moreover, is not,
Looked at properly, the main thing.
It's the heart that really matters.

ANITRA.

Speak, O Master! When thou speakest,
I see gleams, as though of opals!

PEER.

Wisdom in extremes is folly;
Coward blossoms into tyrant;
Truth, when carried to excess,
Ends in wisdom written backwards.
Ay, my daughter, I'm forsworn
As a dog if there are not
Folk with o'erfed souls on earth
Who shall scarce attain to clearness.
Once I met with such a fellow,
Of the flock the very flower;
And even he mistook his goal,
Losing sense in blatant sound.—
See the waste round this oasis.
Were I but to swing my turban,
I could force the ocean-flood
To fill up the whole concern.
But I were a blockhead, truly
Seas and lands to go creating.
Know you what it is to live?

ANITRA.

Teach me!

PEER.

It is to be wafted
Dry-shod down the stream of time,

Wholly, solely as oneself.
Only in full manhood can I
Be the man I am, dear child!
Aged eagle moults his plumage,
Aged fogey lags declining,
Aged dame has ne'er a tooth left,
Aged churl gets withered hands,—
One and all get withered souls.
Youth! Ah Youth! I mean to reign,
As a sultan, whole and fiery,—
Not on Gyntiana's shores,
Under trellised vines and palm-leaves,—
But enthronëd[1] in the freshness
Of a woman's virgin thoughts.—
See you now, my little maiden,
Why I've graciously bewitched you,—
Why I have your heart selected,
And established, so to speak,
T h e r e my being's Caliphate?
All your longings shall be mine.
I'm an autocrat in passion!
You shall live for me alone.
I'll be he who shall enthrall
You like gold and precious stones.
Should we part, then life is over,—
That is, y o u r life, *nota bene!*
Every inch and fibre of you,
Will-less, without yea or nay,
I must know filled full of me.
Midnight beauties of your tresses,
All that's lovely to be named,
Shall, like Babylonian gardens,
Tempt your Sultan to his tryst.

[1] Literally, "on the basis of."

After all, I don't complain, then,
Of your empty forehead-vault.
With a soul, one's oft absorbed in
Contemplation of oneself.
Listen, while we're on the subject,—
If you like it, faith, you shall
Have a ring about your ankle:—
'Twill be best for both of us.
I will be your soul by proxy;
For the rest—why, *status quo*. [ANITRA *snores.*
What! She sleeps! Then has it glided
Bootless past her, all I've said?—
No; it marks my influence o'er her
That she floats away in dreams
On my love-talk as it flows.
[*Rises and lays trinkets in her lap.*
Here are jewels! Here are more!
Sleep, Anitra! Dream of Peer——.
Sleep! In sleeping, you the crown have
Placed upon your Emperor's brow!
Victory on his Person's basis
Has Peer Gynt this night achieved.

SCENE EIGHTH

A caravan route. The oasis is seen far off in the background.

PEER GYNT *comes galloping across the desert on his white horse, with* ANITRA *before him on his saddle-bow.*

ANITRA.

Let be, or I'll bite you!

PEER.

You little rogue!

ANITRA.

What would you?

PEER.

What would I? Play hawk and dove!
Run away with you! Frolic and frisk a bit!

ANITRA.

For shame! An old prophet like you!

PEER.

Oh, stuff!
The prophet's not old at all, you goose!
Do you think all this is a sign of age?

ANITRA.

Let me go! I want to go home!

PEER.

Coquette!
What, home! To papa-in-law! That would be fine!
We madcap birds that have flown from the cage
Must never come into his sight again.
Besides, my child, in the self-same place
It's wisest never to stay too long;
For familiarity lessens respect;—
Most of all when one comes as a prophet or such.
One should show oneself glimpse-wise and pass like a dream.
Faith, 'twas time that the visit should come to an end.
They're unstable of soul, are these sons of the desert;—
Both incense and prayers dwindled off towards the end.

ANITRA.

Yes, but a r e you a prophet?

PEER.

Your Emperor I am! [*Tries to kiss her.*
Why just see now how coy the wee woodpecker is!

ANITRA.

Give me that ring that you have on your finger.

PEER.

Take, sweet Anitra, the whole of the trash!

ANITRA.

Thy words are as songs! Oh, how dulcet their sound!

PEER.

How blessëd to know oneself loved to this pitch!
I'll dismount! Like your slave, I will lead your palfrey!
[*Hands her his riding-whip, and dismounts.*
There now, my rosebud, you exquisite flower!
Here I'll go trudging my way through the sand,
Till a sunstroke o'ertakes me and finishes me.
I'm young, Anitra; bear that in mind!
You mustn't be shocked at my escapades.
Frolics and high-jinks are youth's sole criterion!
And so, if your intellect weren't so dense,
You would see at a glance, oh my fair oleander,—
Your lover is frolicsome—*ergo*, he's young!

ANITRA.

Yes, you are young. Have you any more rings?

PEER.

Am I not? There, grab! I can leap like a buck!
Were there vine-leaves around, I would garland my brow.
To be sure I am young! Hei, I'm going to dance!
[*Dances and sings.*

I am a blissful game-cock!
Peck me, my little pullet!
Hop-sa-sa! Let me trip it;—
I am a blissful game-cock!

ANITRA.

You are sweating, my prophet; I fear you will melt;—
Hand me that heavy bag hung at your belt.

PEER.

Tender solicitude! Bear the purse ever;—
Hearts that can love are content without gold!
[*Dances and sings again.*
Young Peer Gynt is the maddest wag;—
He knows not what foot he shall stand upon.
Pooh, says Peer;—pooh, never mind!
Young Peer Gynt is the maddest wag!

ANITRA.

What joy when the Prophet steps forth in the dance!

PEER.

Oh, bother the Prophet!—Suppose we change clothes!
Heisa! Strip off!

ANITRA.

Your caftan were too long,
Your girdle too wide, and your stockings too tight——

PEER.

Eh bien! [1] [*Kneels down.*
But vouchsafe me a vehement sorrow;—
To a heart full of love, it is sweet to suffer!
Listen; as soon as we're home at my castle——

[1] So in original.

ANITRA.

In your Paradise;—have we far to ride?

PEER.

Oh, a thousand miles or——

ANITRA.

Too far!

PEER.

Oh, listen;—
You shall have the soul that I promised you once——

ANITRA.

Oh, thank you; I'll get on without the soul.
But you asked for a sorrow——

PEER.

[*Rising.*]

Ay, curse me, I did!
A keen one, but short,—to last two or three days.

ANITRA.

Anitra obeyeth the Prophet!—Farewell!

[*Gives him a smart cut across the fingers, and dashes off, at a tearing gallop, back across the desert.*

PEER.

[*Stands for a long time thunderstruck.*]

Well now, may I be——!

SCENE NINTH

The same place, an hour later.

PEER GYNT *is stripping off his Turkish costume, soberly and thoughtfully, bit by bit. Last of all, he takes his little travelling-cap out of his coat pocket, puts it on, and stands once more in European dress.*

PEER.

[*Throwing the turban far away from him.*]

There lies the Turk, then, and here stand I!—
These heathenish doings are no sort of good.
It's lucky 'twas only a matter of clothes,
And not, as the saying goes, bred in the bone.—
What tempted me into that galley at all?
It's best, in the long run, to live as a Christian,
To put away peacock-like ostentation,
To base all one's dealings on law and morality,
To be ever oneself, and to earn at the last a
Speech at one's grave-side, and wreaths on one's coffin.

[*Walks a few steps.*

The hussy;—she was on the very verge
Of turning my head clean topsy-turvy.
May I be a troll if I understand
What it was that dazed and bemused me so.
Well; it's well that's done: had the joke been carried
But one step on, I'd have looked absurd.—
I have erred;——but at least it's a consolation
That my error was due to the false situation.
It wasn't my personal self that fell.
'Twas in fact this prophetical way of life,

So utterly lacking the salt of activity,
That took its revenge in these qualms of bad taste.
It's a sorry business this prophetising!
One's office compels one to walk in a mist;
In playing the prophet, you throw up the game[1]
The moment you act like a rational being.[2]
In so far I've done what the occasion demanded,
In the mere fact of paying my court to that goose.
But, nevertheless—— [*Bursts out laughing.*
H'm, to think of it now!
To try to make time stop by jigging and dancing,
And to cope with the current by capering and prancing!
To thrum on the lute-strings, to fondle and sigh,
And end, like a rooster,—by getting well plucked!
Such conduct is truly prophetic frenzy.—
Yes, plucked!—Phew! I'm plucked clean enough indeed.
Well, well, I've a trifle still left in reserve;
I've a little in America, a little in my pocket;
So I won't be quite driven to beg my bread.—
And at bottom this middle condition is best.
I'm no longer a slave to my coachman and horses;
I haven't to fret about postchaise or baggage;
I am master, in short, of the situation.—
What path should I choose? Many paths lie before me;
And a wise man is known from a fool by his choice.
My business life is a finished chapter;
My love-sports, too, are a cast-off garment.
I feel no desire to live back like a crab.
"Forward or back, and it's just as far;
Out or in, and it's just as strait,"—
So I seem to have read in some luminous[3] work.—

[1] Literally, "you're looed" or "euchred."
[2] Literally, "behave as though sober and wakeful."
[3] Literally, "*spirituel*."

I'll try something new, then; ennoble my course;
Find a goal worth the labour and money it costs.
Shall I write my life without dissimulation,—
A book for guidance and imitation?
Or, stay——! I have plenty of time at command;—
What if, as a travelling scientist,
I should study past ages and time's voracity?
Ay, sure enough, t h a t is the thing for me!
Legends I read e'en in childhood's days,
And since then I've kept up that branch of learning.—
I will follow the path of the human race!
Like a feather I'll float on the stream of history,
Make it all live again, as in a dream,—
See the heroes battling for truth and right,
As an onlooker only, in safety ensconced,—
See thinkers perish and martyrs bleed,
See empires founded and vanish away,—
See world-epochs grow from their trifling seeds;
In short, I will skim off the cream of history.—
I must try to get hold of a volume of Becker,
And travel as far as I can by chronology.—
It's true—my grounding's by no means thorough,
And history's wheels within wheels are deceptive;—
But pooh; the wilder the starting-point,
The result will oft be the more original.—
How exalting it is, now, to choose a goal,
And drive straight for it, like flint and steel!

[*With quiet emotion.*

To break off all round one, on every side,
The bonds that bind one to home and friends,—
To blow into atoms one's hoarded wealth,—
To bid one's love and its joys good night,—
All simply to find the arcana of truth,—

[*Wiping a tear from his eye.*

T h a t is the test of the true man of science!—
I feel myself happy beyond all measure.
N o w I have fathomed my destiny's riddle.
Now 'tis but persevering through thick and thin!
It's excusable, sure, if I hold up my head,
And feel my worth, as the man, Peer Gynt,
Also called Human-life's Emperor.—
I will own the sum-total of bygone days;
I'll nevermore tread in the paths of the living.
The present is not worth so much as a shoe-sole;
All faithless and marrowless the doings of men;
Their soul has no wings and their deeds no weight;——

[*Shrugs his shoulders.*

And women,—ah, they are a worthless crew!

[*Goes off.*

SCENE TENTH

A summer day. Far up in the North. A hut in the forest. The door, with a large wooden bar, stands open. Reindeer-horns over it. A flock of goats by the wall of the hut.

A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN, *fair-haired and comely, sits spinning outside in the sunshine.*

THE WOMAN.

[*Glances down the path and sings.*]

Maybe both the winter and spring will pass by,
And the next summer too, and the whole of the year;—
But thou wilt come one day, that know I full well;

And I will await thee, as I promised of old.[1]
[*Calls the goats, spins, and sings again.*
God strengthen thee, whereso thou goest in the world!
God gladden thee, if at his footstool thou stand!
Here will I await thee till thou comest again;
And if thou wait up yonder, then there we'll meet, my friend!

SCENE ELEVENTH

In Egypt. Daybreak. MEMNON'S STATUE *amid the sands.*

PEER GYNT *enters on foot, and looks around him for a while.*

PEER GYNT.

Here I might fittingly start on my wanderings.—
So now, for a change, I've become an Egyptian;
But Egyptian on the basis of the Gyntish I.
To Assyria next I will bend my steps.
To begin right back at the world's creation
Would lead to nought but bewilderment.
I will go round about[2] all the Bible history;
It's secular traces I'll always be coming on;
And to look, as the saying goes, into its seams,
Lies entirely outside both my plan and my powers.
[*Sits upon a stone.*
Now I will rest me, and patiently wait
Till the statue has sung its habitual dawn-song.
When breakfast is over I'll climb up the pyramid;
If I've time, I'll look through its interior afterwards.

[1] *Sidst*—literally, "when last we met."
[2] "Gå udenom," the phrase used by the Boyg, Act ii. sc. 7.

Then I'll go round the head of the Red Sea by land;
Perhaps I may hit on King Potiphar's grave.—
Next I'll turn Asiatic. In Babylon I'll seek for
The far-renowned harlots and hanging gardens,—
That's to say, the chief traces of civilisation.
Then at one bound to the ramparts of Troy.
From Troy there's a fareway by sea direct
Across to the glorious ancient Athens;—
There on the spot will I, stone by stone,
Survey the Pass that Leonidas guarded.
I will get up the works of the better philosophers,
Find the prison where Socrates suffered, a martyr——;
Oh no, by-the-bye—there's a war there at present——!
Well, my studies in Hellas must e'en be postponed.
[*Looks at his watch.*
It's really too bad, such an age as it takes
For the sun to rise. I am pressed for time.
Well then, from Troy—it was there I left off——
[*Rises and listens.*
What is that strange sort of murmur that's rushing——?
[*Sunrise.*

MEMNON'S STATUE.

[*Sings.*]

From the demigod's ashes there soar, youth-
[renewing,
Birds ever singing.
Zeus the Omniscient
Shaped them contending.
Owls of wisdom,
My birds, where do they slumber?
Thou must die if thou rede not
The song's enigma!

PEER.

How strange now,—I really fancied there came
From the statue a sound. Music, this, of the Past.
I heard the stone-accents now rising, now sinking.—
I will register it, for the learned to ponder.
[*Notes in his pocket-book.*
"The statue did sing. I heard the sound plainly,
But didn't quite follow the text of the song.
The whole thing, of course, was hallucination.—
Nothing else of importance observed to-day."
[*Proceeds on his way.*

SCENE TWELFTH

Near the village of Gizeh. The great SPHINX *carved out of the rock. In the distance the spires and minarets of Cairo.*

PEER GYNT *enters; he examines the* SPHINX *attentively, now through his eyeglass, now through his hollowed hand.*

PEER GYNT.

Now, where in the world have I met before
Something half forgotten that's like this hobgoblin?
For met it I have, in the north or the south.
Was it a person? And, if so, who?
That Memnon, it afterwards crossed my mind,
Was like the Old Man of the Dovrë, so called,
Just as he sat there, stiff and stark,
Planted on end on the stumps of pillars.—
But this most curious mongrel here,
This changeling, a lion and woman in one,—
Does he come to me, too, from a fairy-tale,

Or from a remembrance of something real?
From a fairy-tale? Ho, I remember the fellow!
Why, of course it's the Boyg, that I smote on the skull,—
That is, I dreamt it,—I lay in fever.—
[*Going closer.*
The self-same eyes, and the self-same lips;—
Not quite so lumpish; a little more cunning;
But the same, for the rest, in all essentials.—
Ay, so that's it, Boyg; so you're like a lion
When one sees you from behind and meets you in the day-time!
Are you still good at riddling? Come, let us try.
Now we shall see if you answer as last time!
[*Calls out towards the* SPHINX.
Hei, Boyg, who are you?

A VOICE.

[*Behind the* SPHINX.]

Ach, Sphinx, wer bist du?

PEER.

What! Echo answers in German! How strange!

THE VOICE.

Wer bist du?

PEER.

It speaks it quite fluently too!
That observation is new, and my own.
[*Notes in his book.*
"Echo in German. Dialect, Berlin."
[BEGRIFFENFELDT *comes out from behind the* SPHINX.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

A man!

PEER.

Oh, then it was h e that was chattering.
[*Notes again.*
"Arrived in the sequel at other results."

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

[*With all sorts of restless antics.*]

Excuse me, mein Herr[1]——! Eine Lebensfrage——![1]
What brings you to this place precisely to-day?

PEER.

A visit. I'm greeting a friend of my youth.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

What? The Sphinx——?

PEER.

[*Nods.*]

Yes, I knew him in days gone by.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Famos![1]—And that after such a night!
My temples are hammering as though they would burst!
You know him, man! Answer! Say on! Can you tell
What he is?

PEER.

What he is? Yes, that's easy enough.
He's h i m s e l f.

[1] So in original.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

[*With a bound.*]

Ha, the riddle of life lightened forth
In a flash to my vision!—It's certain he is
Himself?

PEER.

Yes, he says so, at any rate.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Himself! Revolution! thine hour is at hand!
[*Takes off his hat.*
Your name, pray, mein Herr?[1]

PEER.

I was christened Peer Gynt.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

[*In rapt admiration.*]

Peer Gynt! Allegoric! I might have foreseen it.—
Peer Gynt? That must clearly imply: The Unknown,—
The Comer whose coming was augured to me——

PEER.

What, really? And now you are here to meet——?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Peer Gynt! Profound! Enigmatic! Incisive!
Each word, as it were, an abysmal lesson!
What are you?

[1] So in original.

PEER.

[*Modestly.*]

I've always endeavoured to be
Myself. For the rest, here's my passport, you see.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Again that mysterious word at the bottom.
[*Seizes him by the wrist.*
To Cairo! The Interpreters' Kaiser is found!

PEER.

Kaiser?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Come on!

PEER.

Am I really known——?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

[*Dragging him away.*]

The Interpreters' Kaiser—on the basis of Self!

SCENE THIRTEENTH

In Cairo. A large courtyard, surrounded by high walls and buildings. Barred windows; iron cages.
THREE KEEPERS *in the courtyard.* A FOURTH *comes in.*

THE NEWCOMER.

Schafmann, say, where's the director gone?

A KEEPER.

He drove out this morning some time before dawn.

THE FIRST.

I think something must have occurred to annoy him;
For last night——

ANOTHER.

Hush, be quiet; he's there at the door!
[BEGRIFFENFELDT *leads* PEER GYNT *in, locks the gate, and puts the key in his pocket.*

PEER.

[*To himself.*]

Indeed an exceedingly gifted man;
Almost all that he says is beyond comprehension.
[*Looks around.*
So this is the Club of the Savants, eh?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Here you will find them, every man jack of them;—
The group of Interpreters threescore and ten;[1]
Of late it has grown by a hundred and sixty——
[*Shouts to the* KEEPERS.
Mikkel, Schlingelberg, Schafmann, Fuchs,—
Into the cages with you at once!

THE KEEPERS.

We!

[1] This is understood to refer to the authors of the Greek version of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint. We are unable to account for the hundred and sixty recruits to their company.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Who else, pray? Get in, get in!
When the world twirls around, we must twirl with it too.
[*Forces them into a cage.*
He's arrived this morning, the mighty Peer;—
The rest you can guess,—I need say no more.
[*Locks the cage door, and throws the key into a well.*

PEER.

But, my dear Herr Doctor and Director, pray——?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Neither one nor the other! I was before——
Herr Peer, are you secret? I must ease my heart——

PEER.

[*With increasing uneasiness.*]
What is it?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Promise you will not tremble.

PEER.

I will do my best, but——

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

[*Draws him into a corner, and whispers.*]
The Absolute Reason
Departed this life at eleven last night.

PEER.

God help me——!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Why, yes, it's extremely deplorable.
And as I'm placed, you see, it is doubly unpleasant;
For this institution has passed up to now
For what's called a madhouse.

PEER

A madhouse, ha!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Not n o w, understand!

PEER.

[*Softly, pale with fear.*]

Now I see what the place is!
And the man is mad;—and there's none that knows it!
[*Tries to steal away.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

[*Following him.*]

However, I hope you don't misunderstand me?
When I said he was dead, I was talking stuff.
He's beside himself. Started clean out of his skin,—
Just like my compatriot Münchausen's fox.

PEER.

Excuse me a moment——

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

[*Holding him back.*]

I meant like an eel;—
It was not like a fox. A needle through his eye;—
And he writhed on the wall——

PEER.

Where can rescue be found!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

A snick round his neck, and whip! out of his skin!

PEER.

He's raving! He's utterly out of his wits!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Now it's patent, and can't be dissimulated,
That this from-himself-going must have for result
A complete revolution by sea and land.
The persons one hitherto reckoned as mad,
You see, became normal last night at eleven,
Accordant with Reason in its newest phase.
And more, if the matter be rightly regarded,
It's patent that, at the aforementioned hour,
The sane folks, so called, began forthwith to rave.

PEER.

You mentioned the hour, sir; my time is but scant——

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Your time, did you say? There you jog my remembrance! [*Opens a door and calls out.*

Come forth all! The time that shall be is proclaimed!
Reason is dead and gone: long live Peer Gynt!

PEER.

Now, my dear good fellow——!

[*The* LUNATICS *come one by one, and at intervals, into the courtyard.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Good morning! Come forth,
And hail the dawn of emancipation!
Your Kaiser has come to you!

PEER.

Kaiser?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Of course!

PEER.

But the honour's so great, so entirely excessive——

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Oh, do not let any false modesty sway you
At an hour such as this.

PEER.

But at least give me time——
No, indeed, I'm not fit; I'm completely dumbfounded!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

A man who has fathomed the Sphinx's meaning,
A man who's himself!

PEER.

Ay, but that's just the rub.
It's true that in everything I am myself;
But here the point is, if I follow your meaning,
To be, so to phrase it, outside oneself.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Outside? No, there you are strangely mistaken!
It's here, sir, that one is oneself with a vengeance;

Oneself, and nothing whatever besides.
We go, full sail, as our very selves.
Each one shuts himself up in the barrel of self,
In the self-fermentation he dives to the bottom,—
With the self-bung he seals it hermetically,
And seasons the staves in the well of self.
No one has tears for the other's woes;
No one has mind for the other's ideas.
We're our very selves, both in thought and tone,
Ourselves to the spring-board's uttermost verge,—
And so, if a Kaiser's to fill the Throne,
It is clear that you are the very man.

PEER.

O would that the devil——!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Come, don't be cast down;
Almost all things in nature are new at the first.
"Oneself";—come, here you shall see an example;
I'll choose you at random the first man that comes——
[*To a gloomy figure.*
Good-day, Huhu? Well, my boy, wandering round
For ever with misery's impress upon you?

HUHU.[1]

Can I help it, when the people,
Race[2] by race, dies untranslated.[3] [*To* PEER GYNT.
You're a stranger; will you listen?

[1] See Introduction.
[2] Literally, "generation."
[3] Literally, "uninterpreted."

PEER.

[*Bowing.*]

Oh, by all means!

HUHU.

Lend your ear then.—
Eastward far, like brow-borne garlands,
Lie the Malabarish seaboards.
Hollanders and Portugueses
Compass all the land with culture.
There, moreover, swarms are dwelling
Of the pure-bred Malabaris.
These have muddled up the language,
They now lord it in the country.—
But in long-departed ages
There the orang-outang was the ruler.
He, the forest's lord and master,
Freely fought and snarled in freedom.
As the hand of nature shaped him,
Just so grinned he, just so gaped he.
He could shriek unreprehended;
He was ruler in his kingdom.—
Ah, but then the foreign yoke came,
Marred the forest-tongue primeval.
Twice two hundred years of darkness[1]
Brooded o'er the race of monkeys;
And, you know, nights so protracted
Bring a people to a standstill.—
Mute are now the wood-notes primal;
Grunts and growls are heard no longer;—
If we'd utter our ideas,
It must be by means of language.

[1] An allusion to the long period of stagnation in the history of Norway under the Danish rule—say, from 1400 to 1800.

What constraint on all and sundry!
Hollanders and Portugueses,
Half-caste race and Malabaris,
All alike must suffer by it.—
I have tried to fight the battle
Of our real, primal wood-speech,—
Tried to bring to life its carcass,—
Proved the people's right of shrieking,—
Shrieked myself, and shown the need of
Shrieks in poems for the people.—
Scantly, though, my work is valued.—
Now I think you grasp my sorrow.
Thanks for lending me a hearing;—
Have you counsel, let me hear it!

PEER.

[*Softly.*]

It is written: Best be howling
With the wolves that are about you. [*Aloud.*
Friend, if I remember rightly,
There are bushes in Morocco,
Where orang-outangs in plenty
Live with neither bard nor spokesman;—
Their speech sounded Malabarish;—
It was classical and pleasing.
Why don't you, like other worthies,
Emigrate to serve your country?

HUHU.

Thanks for lending me a hearing;—
I will do as you advise me. [*With a large gesture.*
East! thou hast disowned thy singer!
West! thou hast orang-outangs still! [*Goes.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Well, was he himself? I should rather think so.
He's filled with his own affairs, simply and solely.
He's himself in all that comes out of him,—
Himself, just because he's beside himself.
Come here! Now I'll show you another one
Who's no less, since last evening, accordant with Reason.
[*To a* FELLAH, *with a mummy on his back.*
King Apis, how goes it, my mighty lord?

THE FELLAH.

[*Wildly, to* PEER GYNT.]

Am I King Apis?

PEER.

[*Getting behind the* DOCTOR.]

I'm sorry to say
I'm not quite at home in the situation;
But I certainly gather, to judge by your tone——

THE FELLAH.

Now you too are lying.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Your Highness should state
How the whole matter stands.

THE FELLAH.

Yes, I'll tell him my tale.
[*Turns to* PEER GYNT.
Do you see whom I bear on my shoulders?
His name was King Apis of old.

Now he goes by the title of mummy,
And withal he's completely dead.
All the pyramids yonder he builded,
And hewed out the mighty Sphinx,
And fought, as the Doctor puts it,
With the Turks, both to rechts and links.
And therefore the whole of Egypt
Exalted him as a god,
And set up his image in temples,
In the outward shape of a bull.—
But *I* am this very King Apis,
I see that as clear as day;
And if you don't understand it,
You shall understand it soon.
King Apis, you see, was out hunting,
And got off his horse awhile,
And withdrew himself unattended
To a part of my ancestor's land.
But the field that King Apis manured
Has nourished m e with its corn;
And if further proofs are demanded,
Know, I have invisible horns.
Now, isn't it most accursëd
That no one will own my might!
By birth I am Apis of Egypt,
But a fellah in other men's sight.
Can you tell me what course to follow?—
Then counsel me honestly.—
The problem is how to make me
Resemble King Apis the Great.

PEER.

Build pyramids then, your highness,
And carve out a greater Sphinx,

And fight, as the Doctor puts it,
With the Turks, both to rechts and links.

THE FELLAH.

Ay, that is all mighty fine talking!
A fellah! A hungry louse!
I, who scarcely can keep my hovel
Clear even of rats and mice.
Quick, man,—think of something better,
That'll make me both great and safe,
And further, exactly like to
King Apis that's on my back!

PEER.

What if your highness hanged you,
And then, in the lap of earth,
'Twixt the coffin's natural frontiers,
Kept still and completely dead.

THE FELLAH.

I'll do it! My life for a halter!
To the gallows with hide and hair!—
At first there will be some difference,
But that time will smooth away.
[*Goes off and prepares to hang himself.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

There's a personality for you, Herr Peer,—
A man of method——

PEER.

Yes, yes; I see——;
But he'll really hang himself! God grant us grace!
I'll be ill;—I can scarcely command my thoughts.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

A state of transition; it won't last long.

PEER.

Transition? To what? With your leave—I must go——

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

[*Holding him.*]

Are you crazy?

PEER.

Not yet——. Crazy? Heaven forbid!

[*A commotion. The Minister* HUSSEIN[1] *forces his way through the crowd.*

HUSSEIN.

They tell me a Kaiser has come to-day.

[*To* PEER GYNT.

It is you?

PEER.

[*In desperation.*]

Yes, that is a settled thing!

HUSSEIN.

Good.—Then no doubt there are notes to be answered?

PEER.

[*Tearing his hair.*]

Come on! Right you are, sir;—the madder the better!

[1] See note, p. 175.

HUSSEIN.

Will you do me the honour of taking a dip?
[*Bowing deeply.*
I am a pen.

PEER.

[*Bowing still deeper.*]

Why then I am quite clearly
A rubbishy piece of imperial parchment.

HUSSEIN.

My story, my lord, is concisely this:
They take me for a pounce-box,[1] and I am a pen.

PEER.

My story, Sir Pen, is, to put it briefly:
I'm a blank sheet of paper that no one will write on.

HUSSEIN.

No man understands in the least what I'm good for;
They all want to use me for scattering sand with!

PEER.

I was in a woman's keeping a silver-clasped book;—
It's one and the same misprint to be either mad or sane!

HUSSEIN.

Just fancy, what an exhausting life!
To be a pen and never taste the edge of a knife!

[1] The pounce-box (for strewing "pounce" or sand on undried ink) had not yet been quite superseded by blotting-paper.

PEER.

[*With a high leap.*]

Just fancy, for a reindeer to leap from on high—
To fall and fall—and never feel the ground beneath your hoofs!

HUSSEIN.

A knife! I am blunt;—quick, mend me and slit me!
The world will go to ruin if they don't mend my point for me!

PEER.

A pity for the world which, like other self-made things,
Was reckoned by the Lord to be so excellently good.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Here's a knife!

HUSSEIN.

[*Seizing it.*]

Ah, how I shall lick up the ink now!
Oh, what rapture to cut oneself! [*Cuts his throat.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

[*Stepping aside.*]

Pray do not sputter.

PEER.

[*In increasing terror.*]

Hold him!

HUSSEIN.

Ay, hold me! That is the word!
Hold! Hold the pen! On the desk with the paper——!
[*Falls.*

I'm outworn. The postscript—remember it, pray:
He lived and he died as a fate-guided pen.[1]

PEER.

[*Dizzily.*]

What shall I——! What am I? Thou mighty——hold fast!
I am all that thou wilt,—I'm a Turk, I'm a sinner——
A hill-troll——; but help;—there was something that burst——! [*Shrieks.*
I cannot just hit on thy name at the moment;—
Oh, come to my aid, thou—all madmen's protector!
[*Sinks down insensible.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

[*With a wreath of straw in his hand, gives a bound and sits astride of him.*]

Ha! See him in the mire enthronëd;—
Beside himself—— To crown him now!
[*Presses the wreath on* PEER GYNT'S *head, and shouts:*
Long life, long life to Self-hood's Kaiser!

SCHAFMANN.

[*In the cage.*]

Es lebe hoch der grosse Peer!

[1] "En påholden pen." "Underskrive med påholden pen"—to sign by touching a pen which is guided by another.

ACT FIFTH

SCENE FIRST

On board a ship on the North Sea, off the Norwegian coast. Sunset. Stormy weather.

PEER GYNT, *a vigorous old man, with grizzled hair and beard, is standing aft on the poop. He is dressed half sailor-fashion, with a pea-jacket and long boots. His clothing is rather the worse for wear; he himself is weather-beaten, and has a somewhat harder expression. The* CAPTAIN *is standing beside the steersman at the wheel. The crew are forward.*

PEER GYNT.

[*Leans with his arms on the bulwark, and gazes towards the land.*]

Look at Hallingskarv[1] in his winter furs;—
He's ruffling it, old one, in the evening glow.
The Jokel,[1] his brother, stands behind him askew;
He's got his green ice-mantle still on his back.
The Folgefånn,[1] now, she is mighty fine,—
Lying there like a maiden in spotless white.
Don't you be madcaps, old boys that you are!
Stand where you stand; you're but granite knobs.

THE CAPTAIN.

[*Shouts forward.*]

Two hands to the wheel, and the lantern aloft!

[1] Mountains and glaciers.

PEER.

It's blowing up stiff——

THE CAPTAIN.

——for a gale to-night.

PEER.

Can one see the Rondë Hills from the sea?

THE CAPTAIN.

No, how should you? They lie at the back of the snow-fields.

PEER.

Or Blåhö?[1]

THE CAPTAIN.

No; but from up in the rigging,
You've a glimpse, in clear weather, of Galdhöpiggen.[1]

PEER.

Where does Hårteig[1] lie?

THE CAPTAIN.

[*Pointing.*]

About over there.

PEER.

I thought so.

THE CAPTAIN.

You know where you are, it appears.

[1] Mountains and glaciers.

PEER.

When I left the country, I sailed by here;
And the dregs, says the proverb, hang in to the last.
[*Spits, and gazes at the coast.*
In there, where the screes and the clefts lie blue,—
Where the valleys, like trenches, gloom narrow and black,—
And underneath, skirting the open fiords,—
It's in places like t h e s e human beings abide.
[*Looks at the* CAPTAIN.
They build far apart in this country.

THE CAPTAIN.

Ay;
Few are the dwellings and far between.

PEER.

Shall we get in by day-break?

THE CAPTAIN.

Thereabouts;
If we don't have too dirty a night altogether.

PEER.

It grows thick in the west.

THE CAPTAIN.

It does so.

PEER.

Stop a bit!
You might put me in mind when we make up accounts—
I'm inclined, as the phrase goes, to do a good turn
To the crew——

THE CAPTAIN.

I thank you.

PEER.

It won't be much
I have dug for gold, and lost what I found;—
We are quite at loggerheads, Fate and I.
You know what I've got in safe keeping on board—
That's all I have left;—the rest's gone to the devil.

THE CAPTAIN.

It's more than enough, though, to make you of weight
Among people at home here.

PEER.

I've no relations.
There's no one awaiting the rich old curmudgeon.—
Well; that saves you, at least, any scenes on the pier!

THE CAPTAIN.

Here comes the storm.

PEER.

Well, remember then—
If any of your crew are in real need,
I won't look too closely after the money——

THE CAPTAIN.

That's kind. They are most of them ill enough off;
They have all got their wives and their children at home.
With their wages alone they can scarce make ends meet;
But if they come home with some cash to the good,
It will be a return not forgot in a hurry.

PEER.

What do you say? Have they wives and children?
Are they married?

THE CAPTAIN.

Married? Ay, every man of them.
But the one that is worst off of all is the cook;
Black famine is ever at home in his house.

PEER.

Married? They've folks that await them at home?
Folks to be glad when they come? Eh?

THE CAPTAIN.

Of course,
In poor people's fashion.

PEER.

And come they one evening,
What then?

THE CAPTAIN.

Why, I daresay the goodwife will fetch
Something good for a treat——

PEER.

And a light in the sconce?

THE CAPTAIN.

Ay, ay, may be two; and a dram to their supper.

PEER.

And there they sit snug! There's a fire on the hearth!
They've their children about them! The room's full of chatter;
Not one hears another right out to an end,
For the joy that is on them——!

THE CAPTAIN.

It's likely enough.
So it's really kind, as you promised just now,
To help eke things out.

PEER.

[*Thumping the bulwark.*]

I'll be damned if I do!
Do you think I am mad? Would you have me fork out
For the sake of a parcel of other folks' brats?
I've slaved much too sorely in earning my cash.
There's nobody waiting for old Peer Gynt.

THE CAPTAIN.

Well, well; as you please then; your money's your own

PEER.

Right! Mine it is, and no one else's.
We'll reckon as soon as your anchor is down!
Take my fare, in the cabin, from Panama here.
Then brandy all round to the crew. Nothing more.
If I give a doit more, slap my jaw for me, Captain.

THE CAPTAIN.

I owe you a quittance, and not a thrashing;—
But excuse me, the wind's blowing up to a gale.

[*He goes forward. It has fallen dark; lights are lit in the cabin. The sea increases. Fog and thick clouds.*

PEER.

To have a whole bevy of youngsters at home;—
Still to dwell in their minds as a coming delight;—
To have others' thoughts follow you still on your path!—
There's never a soul gives a thought to me.—
Lights in the sconces! I'll put out those lights.
I will hit upon something!—I'll make them all drunk;—
Not one of the devils shall go sober ashore.
They shall all come home drunk to their children and wives!
They shall curse; bang the table till it rings again,—
They shall scare those that wait for them out of their wits!
The goodwife shall scream and rush forth from the house,—
Clutch her children along! All their joy gone to ruin!

[*The ship gives a heavy lurch; he staggers and keeps his balance with difficulty.*

Why, that was a buffet and no mistake.
The sea's hard at labour, as though it were paid for it;—
It's still itself here on the coasts of the north;—
A cross-sea, as wry and wrong-headed as ever——

[*Listens.*

Why, what can those screams be?

THE LOOK-OUT.

[*Forward.*]

A wreck a-lee.

THE CAPTAIN.

[*On the main deck, shouts.*]

Starboard your helm! Bring her up to the wind!

THE MATE.

Are there men on the wreck?

THE LOOK-OUT.

I can just see three!

PEER.

Quick! lower the stern boat——

THE CAPTAIN.

She'd fill ere she floated.
[*Goes forward.*

PEER.

Who can think of that now? [*To some of the crew.*
If you're men, to the rescue!
What the devil, if you should get a bit of a ducking!

THE BOATSWAIN.

It's out of the question in such a sea.

PEER.

They are screaming again! There's a lull in the wind.—
Cook, will you risk it? Quick! I will pay——

THE COOK.

No, not if you offered me twenty pounds-sterling——[1]

[1] So in original.

PEER.

You hounds! You chicken-hearts! Can you forget
These are men that have goodwives and children at home?
There they're sitting and waiting——

THE BOATSWAIN.

Well, patience is wholesome.

THE CAPTAIN.

Bear away from that sea!

THE MATE.

There the wreck capsized!

PEER.

All is silent of a sudden——!

THE BOATSWAIN.

Were they married, as you think,
There are three new-baked widows even now in the world.

[*The storm increases.* PEER GYNT *moves away aft.*

PEER.

There is no faith left among men any more,—
No Christianity,—well may they say it and write it;—
Their good deeds are few and their prayers are still fewer,
And they pay no respect to the Powers above them.—
In a storm like to-night's, he's a terror, the Lord is.
These beasts should be careful, and think, what's the truth,
That it's dangerous playing with elephants;—

And yet they must openly brave his displeasure!
I am no whit to blame; for the sacrifice
I can prove I stood ready, my money in hand.
But how does it profit me?—What says the proverb?
A conscience at ease is a pillow of down.
Oh ay, that is all very well on dry land,
But I'm blest if it matters a snuff on board ship,
When a decent man's out on the seas with such riff-raff.
At sea one can never be oneself;
One must go with the others from deck to keel;
If for boatswain and cook the hour of vengeance should strike,
I shall no doubt be swept to the deuce with the rest;—
One's personal welfare is clean set aside;—
One counts but as a sausage in slaughtering-time.—
My mistake is this: I have been too meek;
And I've had no thanks for it after all.
Were I younger, I think I would shift the saddle,
And try how it answered to lord it awhile.
There is time enough yet! They shall know in the parish
That Peer has come sailing aloft o'er the seas!
I'll get back the farmstead by fair means or foul;—
I will build it anew; it shall shine like a palace.
But none shall be suffered to enter the hall!
They shall stand at the gateway, all twirling their caps;—
They shall beg and beseech—t h a t they freely may do;
But none gets so much as a farthing of mine.
If I ' v e had to howl 'neath the lashes of fate,
Trust me to find folks I can lash in my turn——

THE STRANGE PASSENGER.

[*Stands in the darkness at* PEER GYNT'S *side, and salutes him in friendly fashion.*]

Good evening!

PEER.

Good evening! What——? Who are you?

THE PASSENGER.

Your fellow-passenger, at your service.

PEER.

Indeed? I thought I was the only one.

THE PASSENGER.

A mistaken impression, which now is set right.

PEER.

But it's singular that, for the first time to-night,
I should see you——

THE PASSENGER.

I never come out in the day-time.

PEER.

Perhaps you are ill? You're as white as a sheet——

THE PASSENGER.

No, thank you—my health is uncommonly good.

PEER.

What a raging storm!

THE PASSENGER.

Ay, a blessëd one, man!

PEER.

A blessëd one?

THE PASSENGER.

Sea's running high as houses.
Ah, one can feel one's mouth watering!
Just think of the wrecks that to-night will be shattered;—
And think, too, what corpses will drive ashore!

PEER.

Lord save us:

THE PASSENGER.

Have ever you seen a man strangled,
Or hanged,—or drowned?

PEER.

This is going too far——!

THE PASSENGER.

The corpses all laugh. But their laughter is forced;
And the most part are found to have bitten their tongues.

PEER.

Hold off from me——!

THE PASSENGER.

Only one question, pray!
If we, for example, should strike on a rock,
And sink in the darkness——

PEER.

You think there is danger?

THE PASSENGER.

I really don't know what I ought to say.
But suppose, now, I float and you go to the bottom——

PEER.

Oh, rubbish——

THE PASSENGER.

It's just a hypothesis.
But when one is placed with one foot in the grave,
One grows soft-hearted and open-handed——

PEER.

[*Puts his hand in his pocket.*]
Ho, money?

THE PASSENGER.

No, no; but perhaps you would kindly
Make me a gift of your much-esteemed carcase——?

PEER.

This is t o o much!

THE PASSENGER.

No more than your body, you know!
To help my researches in science——

PEER.

Begone!

THE PASSENGER.

But think, my dear sir—the advantage is yours!
I'll have you laid open and brought to the light.
What I specially seek is the centre of dreams,—
And with critical care I'll look into your seams——

PEER.

Away with you!

THE PASSENGER.

Why, my dear sir—a drowned corpse——!

PEER.

Blasphemer! You're goading the rage of the storm!
I call it too bad! Here it's raining and blowing,
A terrible sea on, and all sorts of signs
Of something that's likely to shorten our days;—
And you carry on so as to make it come quicker!

THE PASSENGER.

You're in no mood, I see, to negotiate further;
But time, you know, brings with it many a change——
[*Nods in a friendly fashion.*
We'll meet when you're sinking, if not before;
Perhaps I may then find you more in the humour.
[*Goes into the cabin.*

PEER.

Unpleasant companions these scientists are!
With their freethinking ways——
[*To the* BOATSWAIN, *who is passing.*
Hark, a word with you, friend!
That passenger? What crazy creature is he?

THE BOATSWAIN.

I know of no passenger here but yourself.

PEER.

No others? This thing's getting worse and worse.
[*To the* SHIP'S BOY, *who comes out of the cabin.*
Who went down the companion just now?

THE BOY.

The ship's dog, sir!
[*Passes on.*

THE LOOK-OUT.

[*Shouts.*]

Land close ahead!

PEER.

Where's my box? Where's my trunk?
All the baggage on deck!

THE BOATSWAIN.

We have more to attend to!

PEER.

It was nonsense, captain! 'Twas only my joke;—
As sure as I'm here I will help the cook——

THE CAPTAIN.

The jib's blown away!

THE MATE.

And there went the foresail!

THE BOATSWAIN.

[*Shrieks from forward.*]

Breakers under the bow!

THE CAPTAIN.

She will go to shivers!
[*The ship strikes. Noise and confusion.*

SCENE SECOND

Close under the land, among sunken rocks and surf. The ship sinks. The jolly-boat, with two men in her, is seen for a moment through the scud. A sea strikes her; she fills and upsets. A shriek is heard; then all is silent for a while. Shortly afterwards the boat appears floating bottom upwards.

PEER GYNT *comes to the surface near the boat.*

PEER.

Help! Help! A boat! Help! I'll be drowned!
Save me, oh Lord—as saith the text!
[*Clutches hold of the boat's keel.*

THE COOK.

[*Comes up on the other side.*]

Oh, Lord God—for my children's sake,
Have mercy! Let me reach the land!
[*Seizes hold of the keel.*

PEER.

Let go!

THE COOK.

Let go!

PEER.

I'll strike!

THE COOK.

So'll I!

PEER.

I'll crush you down with kicks and blows!
Let go your hold! She won't float two!

THE COOK.

I know it! Yield!

PEER.

Yield you!

THE COOK.

Oh yes!

[*They fight; one of the* COOK'S *hands is disabled; he clings on with the other.*

PEER.

Off with that hand!

THE COOK.

Oh, kind sir—spare!
Think of my little ones at home!

PEER.

I need my life far more than you,
For I am lone and childless still.

THE COOK.

Let go! You've lived, and I am young!

PEER.

Quick; haste you; sink;—you drag us down.

THE COOK.

Have mercy! Yield in heaven's name!
There's none to miss and mourn for you—
[*His hands slip; he screams.*
I'm drowning!

PEER.

[*Seizing him.*]

By this wisp of hair
I'll hold you; say your Lord's Prayer, quick!

THE COOK.

I can't remember; all turns black——

PEER.

Come, the essentials in a word——!

THE COOK.

Give us this day——!

PEER.

Skip that part, Cook;
You'll get all y o u need, safe enough.

THE COOK.

Give us this day——

PEER.

The same old song!
'Tis plain you were a cook in life——
[*The* COOK *slips from his grasp.*

THE COOK.

[*Sinking.*]

Give us this day our—— [*Disappears.*

PEER.

Amen, lad!
To the last gasp you were yourself.—
[*Draws himself up on to the bottom of the boat.*
So long as there is life there's hope——

THE STRANGE PASSENGER.

[*Catches hold of the boat.*]

Good morning!

PEER.

Hoy!

THE PASSENGER.

I heard you shout.—
It's pleasant finding you again.
Well? So my prophecy came true!

PEER.

Let go! Let go! 'Twill scarce float o n e!

THE PASSENGER.

I'm striking out with my left leg.
I'll float, if only with their tips
My fingers rest upon this ledge.
But apropos: your body——

PEER.

Hush!

THE PASSENGER.

The rest, of course, is done for, clean——

PEER.

No more?

THE PASSENGER.

Exactly as you please. [*Silence.*

PEER.

Well?

THE PASSENGER.

I am silent.

PEER.

Satan's tricks!—
What now?

THE PASSENGER.

I'm waiting.

PEER.

[*Tearing his hair.*]
I'll go mad!—
What are you?

THE PASSENGER.

[*Nods.*]
Friendly.

PEER.

What else! Speak!

THE PASSENGER.

What think you? Do you know none other
That's like me?

PEER.

Do I know the devil——?

THE PASSENGER.

[*In a low voice.*]

Is it h i s way to light a lantern
For life's night-pilgrimage through fear?

PEER.

Ah, come! When once the thing's cleared up,
You'd seem a messenger of light?

THE PASSENGER.

Friend,—have you o n c e in each half-year
Felt all the earnestness of dread? [1]

PEER.

Why, one's afraid when danger threatens;—
But all your words have double meanings.[2]

THE PASSENGER.

Ay, have you gained but o n c e in life
The victory that is given in dread?

[1] "Angst"—literally, "dread" or "terror"—probably means here something like "conviction of sin." The influence of the Danish theologian, Sören Kierkegård, may be traced in this passage.

[2] Literally, "Are set on screws."

PEER.

[*Looks at him.*]

Came you to ope for me a door,
'Twas stupid not to come before.
What sort of sense is there in choosing
Your time when seas gape to devour one?

THE PASSENGER.

Were, then, the victory more likely
Beside your hearthstone, snug and quiet?

PEER.

Perhaps not; but your talk was quizzical.
How could you fancy it awakening?

THE PASSENGER.

Where I come from, there smiles are prized
As highly as pathetic style.

PEER.

All has its time; what fits the taxman,[1]
So says the text, would damn the bishop.

THE PASSENGER.

The host whose dust inurned has slumbered
Treads not on week-days the cothurnus.

PEER.

Avaunt thee, bugbear! Man, begone!
I will not die! I m u s t ashore!

[1] "Tolder," the biblical "publican."

THE PASSENGER.

Oh, as for t h a t, be reassured;—
One dies not midmost of Act Five. [*Glides away.*

PEER.

Ah, there he let it out at last;—
He was a sorry moralist.

SCENE THIRD

Churchyard in a high-lying mountain parish. A funeral is going on. By the grave, the PRIEST *and a gathering of people. The last verse of the psalm is being sung.* PEER GYNT *passes by on the road.*

PEER.

[*At the gate.*]

Here's a countryman going the way of all flesh.
God be thanked that it isn't me. [*Enters the churchyard.*

THE PRIEST.

[*Speaking beside the grave.*]

Now, when the soul has gone to meet its doom,
And here the dust lies, like an empty pod,—
Now, my dear friends, we'll speak a word or two
About this dead man's pilgrimage on earth.
He was not wealthy, neither was he wise,
His voice was weak, his bearing was unmanly,
He spoke his mind abashed and faltering,
He scarce was master at his own fireside;
He sidled into church, as though appealing

For leave, like other men, to take his place.
It was from Gudbrandsdale, you know, he came.
When here he settled he was but a lad;—
And you remember how, to the very last,
He kept his right hand hidden in his pocket.
That right hand in the pocket was the feature
That chiefly stamped his image on the mind,—
And therewithal his writhing, his abashed
Shrinking from notice wheresoe'er he went.
But, though he still pursued a path aloof,
And ever seemed a stranger in our midst,
You all know what he strove so hard to hide,—
The hand he muffled had four fingers only.—
I well remember, many years ago,
One morning; there were sessions held at Lundë.
'Twas war-time, and the talk in every mouth
Turned on the country's sufferings and its fate.
I stood there watching. At the table sat
The Captain, 'twixt the Bailiff [1] and the sergeants;
Lad after lad was measured up and down,
Passed, and enrolled, and taken for a soldier.
The room was full, and from the green outside,
Where thronged the young folks, loud the laughter rang.
A name was called, and forth another stepped,
One pale as snow upon the glacier's edge.
They bade the youth advance; he reached the table;
We saw his right hand swaddled in a clout;—
He gasped, he swallowed, battling after words,—
But, though the Captain urged him, found no voice.
Ah yes, at last! Then with his cheek aflame,
His tongue now failing him, now stammering fast
He mumbled something of a scythe that slipped
By chance, and shore his finger to the skin.

[1] See footnote, p. 136.

Straightway a silence fell upon the room.
Men bandied meaning glances; they made mouths;
They stoned the boy with looks of silent scorn.
He felt the hail-storm, but he saw it not.
Then up the Captain stood, the grey old man;
He spat, and pointed forth, and thundered "Go!"
And the lad went. On both sides men fell back,
Till through their midst he had to run the gauntlet.
He reached the door; from there he took to flight;—
Up, up he went,—through wood and over hillside,
Up through the stone-screes, rough, precipitous.
He had his home up there among the mountains.—
It was some six months later he came here,
With mother, and betrothed, and little child.
He leased some ground upon the high hill-side,
There where the waste lands trend away towards Lomb
He married the first moment that he could;
He built a house; he broke the stubborn soil;
He throve, as many a cultivated patch
Bore witness, bravely clad in waving gold.
At church he kept his right hand in his pocket,—
But sure I am at home his fingers nine
Toiled every whit as hard as others' ten.—
One spring the torrent washed it all away.
Their lives were spared. Ruined and stripped of all,
He set to work to make another clearing;
And, ere the autumn, smoke again arose
From a new, better-sheltered, mountain farm-house.
Sheltered? From torrent—not from avalanche;
Two years, and all beneath the snow lay buried.
But still the avalanche could not daunt his spirit.
He dug, and raked, and carted—cleared the ground—
And the next winter, ere the snow-blasts came,
A third time was his little homestead reared,

Three sons he had, three bright and stirring boys;
They must to school, and school was far away;—
And they must clamber, where the hill-track failed,
By narrow ledges past the headlong scree.
What did he do? The eldest had to manage
As best he might, and, where the path was worst,
His father bound a rope round him to stay him;—
The others on his back and arms he bore.
Thus he toiled, year by year, till they were men.
Now might he well have looked for some return.
In the New World, three prosperous gentlemen
Their school-going and their father have forgotten.
He was short-sighted. Out beyond the circle
Of those most near to him he nothing saw.
To him seemed meaningless as cymbals' tinkling
Those words that to the heart should ring like steel.
His race, his fatherland, all things high and shining,
Stood ever, to his vision, veiled in mist.
But he was humble, humble, was this man;
And since that sessions-day his doom oppressed him,
As surely as his cheeks were flushed with shame,
And his four fingers hidden in his pocket.—
Offender 'gainst his country's laws? Ay, true!
But there is one thing that the law outshineth
Sure as the snow-white tent of Glittertind [1]
Has clouds, like higher rows of peaks, above it.
No patriot was he. Both for church and state
A fruitless tree. But there, on the upland ridge,
In the small circle where he saw his calling,
T h e r e he was great, because he was himself.
His inborn note rang true unto the end.
His days were as a lute with muted strings.

[1] A mountain in the Jotunheim. The name means "glittering peak."

And therefore, peace be with thee, silent warrior,
That fought the peasant's little fight, and fell!
It is not ours to search the heart and reins;—
That is no task for dust, but for its ruler;—
Yet dare I freely, firmly, speak my hope:
He scarce stands crippled now before his God!

[*The gathering disperses.* PEER GYNT *remains behind, alone.*

PEER.

Now t h a t i s what I call Christianity!
Nothing to seize on one's mind unpleasantly.—
And the topic—immovably being oneself,—
That the pastor's homily turned upon,—
Is full, in its essence, of edification.
[*Looks down upon the grave.*
Was it he, I wonder, that hacked through his knuckle
That day I was out hewing logs in the forest?
Who knows? If I weren't standing here with my staff
By the side of the grave of this kinsman in spirit,
I could almost believe it was I that slept,
And heard in a vision my panegyric.—
It's a seemly and Christianlike custom indeed
This casting a so-called memorial glance
In charity over the life that is ended.
I shouldn't at all mind accepting my verdict
At the hands of this excellent parish priest.
Ah well, I dare say I have some time left
Ere the gravedigger comes to invite me to stay with him;—
And as Scripture has it: What's best is best,—
And: Enough for the day is the evil thereof,— [1]

[1] "Den tid den sorg"—literally, "That time that sorrow" or "care."

And further: Discount not thy funeral.—
Ah, the Church, after all, is the true consoler.
I've hitherto scarcely appreciated it;—
But now I feel clearly how blessëd it is
To be well assured upon sound authority:
Even as thou sowest thou shalt one day reap.—
One must be oneself; for oneself and one's own
One must do one's best, both in great and in small things.
If the luck goes against you, at least you've the honour
Of a life carried through in accordance with principle.—
Now homewards! Though narrow and steep the path,
Though fate to the end may be never so biting—
Still old Peer Gynt will pursue his own way,
And remain what he is: poor, but virtuous ever.

[*Goes out.*

SCENE FOURTH

A hill-side seamed by the dry bed of a torrent. A ruined mill-house beside the stream. The ground is torn up, and the whole place waste. Further up the hill, a large farm-house.

An auction is going on in front of the farm-house. There is a great gathering of people, who are drinking, with much noise. PEER GYNT *is sitting on a rubbish-heap beside the mill.*

PEER.

Forward and back, and it's just as far;
Out and in, and it's just as strait.—
Time wears away and the river gnaws on.
Go roundabout, the Boyg said;—and here one must.

A Man Dressed in Mourning.

Now there is only rubbish left over.

[*Catches sight of* Peer Gynt.

Are there strangers here too? God be with you, good friend!

Peer.

Well met! You have lively times here to-day.
Is't a christening junket or wedding feast?

The Man in Mourning.

I'd rather call it a house-warming treat;—
The bride is laid in a wormy bed.

Peer.

And the worms are squabbling for rags and clouts.

The Man in Mourning.

That's the end of the ditty; it's over and done.

Peer.

All the ditties end just alike;
And they're all old together; I knew 'em as a boy.

A Lad of Twenty.

[*With a casting-ladle.*]

Just look what a rare thing I've been buying!
In this Peer Gynt cast his silver buttons.

Another.

Look at mine, though! The money-bag [1] bought for a halfpenny.

[1] Literally, "the bushel." See note, p. 45.

A Third.

No more, eh? Twopence for the pedlar's pack!

Peer.

Peer Gynt? Who was he?

The Man in Mourning.

All I know is this:
He was kinsman to Death and to Aslak the Smith.

A Man in Grey.

You're forgetting me, man! Are you mad or drunk?

The Man in Mourning.

You forget that at Hegstad was a storehouse door.

The Man in Grey.

Ay, true; but we know you were never dainty.

The Man in Mourning.

If only she doesn't give Death the slip——

The Man in Grey.

Come, kinsman! A dram, for our kinship's sake!

The Man in Mourning.

To the deuce with your kinship! You're maundering in drink——

THE MAN IN GREY.

Oh, rubbish; blood's never so thin as all that;
One cannot but feel one's akin to Peer Gynt.
[*Goes off with him.*

PEER.

[*To himself.*]

One meets with acquaintances.

A LAD.

[*Calls after the* MAN IN MOURNING.]

Mother that's dead
Will be after you, Aslak, if you wet your whistle.

PEER.

[*Rises.*]

The husbandman's saying seems scarce to hold here:
The deeper one harrows the better it smells.

A LAD.

[*With a bear's skin.*]

Look, the cat of the Dovrë![1] Well, only his fell,
It was he chased the trolls out on Christmas Eve.

ANOTHER.

[*With a reindeer skull.*]

Here is the wonderful reindeer that bore,
At Gendin, Peer Gynt over edge and scree.

[1] See Appendix.

A Third.

[*With a hammer, calls out to the* Man in Mourning.]
Hei, Aslak, this sledge-hammer, say, do you know it?
Was it this that you used when the devil clove the wall?

A Fourth.

[*Empty-handed.*]

Mads Moen, here's the invisible cloak
Peer Gynt and Ingrid flew off through the air with.

Peer.

Brandy here, boys! I feel I'm grown old;—
I must put up to auction my rubbish and lumber!

A Lad.

What have you to sell, then?

Peer.

A palace I have;—
It lies in the Rondë; it's solidly built.

The Lad.

A button is bid!

Peer.

You must run to a dram.
'Twere a sin and a shame to bid anything less.

Another.

He's a jolly old boy this!

[*The bystanders crowd around him.*

PEER.

[*Shouts.*]

Granë,[1] my steed;
Who bids?

ONE OF THE CROWD.

Where's he running?

PEER.

Why, far in the west!
Near the sunset, my lads! Ah, that courser can fly
As fast, ay, as fast as Peer Gynt could lie.

VOICES.

What more have you got?

PEER.

I've both rubbish and gold!
I bought it with ruin; I'll sell it at a loss.

A LAD.

Put it up!

PEER.

A dream of a silver-clasped book!
That you can have for an old hook and eye.

THE LAD.

To the devil with dreams!

PEER.

Here's my Kaiserdom!
I throw it in the midst of you; scramble for it!

[1] See footnote, p. 157.

THE LAD.

Is the crown given in?

PEER.

Of the loveliest straw.
It will fit whoever first puts it on.
Hei, there is more yet! An addled egg!
A madman's grey hair! And the Prophet's beard!
All these shall be his that will show on the hillside.
A post that has writ on it; Here lies your path!

THE BAILIFF.[1]

[*Who has come up.*]

You're carrying on, my good man, so that almost
I think that your path will lead straight to the lock-up.

PEER.

[*Hat in hand.*]

Quite likely. But, tell me, who was Peer Gynt?

THE BAILIFF.

Oh, nonsense——

PEER.

Your pardon! Most humbly I beg——!

THE BAILIFF.

Oh, he's said to have been an abominable liar——[2]

PEER.

A liar——?

[1] See footnote, p. 136.

[2] "Digter"; means also "poet."

THE BAILIFF.

Yes—all that was strong and great
He made believe always that h e had done it.
But, excuse me, friend—I have other duties——

[*Goes.*

PEER.

And where is he now, this remarkable man?

AN ELDERLY MAN.

He fared over seas to a foreign land;
It went ill with him there, as one well might foresee;—
It's many a year now since he was hanged.

PEER.

Hanged! Ay, ay! Why, I thought as much;
Our lamented Peer Gynt was himself to the last.

[*Bows.*

Good-bye,—and best thanks for to-day's merry meeting.

[*Goes a few steps, but stops again.*

You joyous youngsters, you comely lasses,—
Shall I pay my shot with a traveller's tale?

SEVERAL VOICES.

Yes; do you know any?

PEER.

Nothing more easy.—

[*He comes nearer; a look of strangeness comes over him.*

I was gold-digging once in San Francisco.
There were mountebanks swarming all over the town.

One with his toes could perform on the fiddle;
Another could dance a Spanish halling [1] on his knees;
A third, I was told, kept on making verses
While his brain-pan was having a hole bored right through it.
To the mountebank-meeting came also the devil;—
Thought h e ' d try his luck with the rest of them.
His talent was this: in a manner convincing,
He was able to grunt like a flesh-and-blood pig.
He was not recognised, yet his manners [2] attracted.
The house was well filled; expectation ran high.
He stepped forth in a cloak with an ample cape to it;
Man mus sich drappiren, as the Germans say.
But under the mantle—what none suspected—
He'd managed to smuggle a real live pig.
And now he opened the representation;
The devil he pinched, and the pig gave voice.
The whole thing purported to be a fantasia
On the porcine existence, both free and in bonds;
And all ended up with a slaughter-house squeal—
Whereupon the performer bowed low and retired.—
The critics discussed and appraised the affair;
The tone of the whole was attacked and defended.
Some fancied the vocal expression too thin,
While some thought the death-shriek too carefully studied;
But all were agreed as to one thing: *qua* grunt,
The performance was grossly exaggerated.—
Now t h a t, you see, came of the devil's stupidity
In not taking the measure of his public first.

[*He bows and goes off. A puzzled silence comes over the crowd.*

[1] See footnotes, pp. 65 and 66.
[2] In the original, "Personlighed"—personality.

SCENE FIFTH

Whitsun Eve.—In the depths of the forest. To the back, in a clearing, is a hut with a pair of reindeer horns over the porch-gable.

PEER GYNT *is creeping among the undergrowth, gathering wild onions.*

PEER.

Well, this is one standpoint. Where is the next?
One should try all things and choose the best.
Well, I have done so,—beginning from Cæsar,
And downwards as far as to Nebuchadnezzar.
So I've had, after all, to go through Bible history;—
The old boy has come back to his mother again.
After all it is written: Of the earth art thou come.—
The main thing in life is to fill one's belly.
Fill it with onions? That's not much good;—
I must take to cunning, and set out snares.
There's water in the beck here; I shan't suffer thirst;
And I count as the first 'mong the beasts after all.
When my time comes to die—as most likely it will,—
I shall crawl in under a wind-fallen tree;
Like the bear, I will heap up a leaf-mound above me,
And I'll scratch in big print on the bark of the tree:
Here rests Peer Gynt, that decent soul
Kaiser o'er all of the other beasts.—
Kaiser? [*Laughs inwardly.*
Why, you old soothsayer's-dupe!
No Kaiser are you; you are nought but an onion.
I'm going to peel you now, my good Peer!
You won't escape either by begging or howling.
[*Takes an onion and strips off one coat after another.*
There lies the outermost layer, all torn;
That's the shipwrecked man on the jolly-boat's keel.

Here's the passenger layer, scanty and thin;—
And yet in its taste there's a tang of Peer Gynt.
Next underneath is the gold-digger ego;
The juice is all gone—if it ever had any.
This coarse-grained layer with the hardened skin
Is the peltry hunter by Hudson's Bay.
The next one looks like a crown;—oh, thanks!
We'll throw it away without more ado.
Here's the archæologist, short but sturdy,
And here is the Prophet, juicy and fresh.
He stinks, as the Scripture has it, of lies,
Enough to bring the water to an honest man's eyes.
This layer that rolls itself softly together
Is the gentleman, living in ease and good cheer.
The next one seems sick. There are black streaks upon it;—
Black symbolises both parsons and niggers.
[*Pulls off several layers at once.*
What an enormous number of swathings!
Is not the kernel soon coming to light?
[*Pulls the whole onion to pieces.*
I'm blest if it is! To the innermost centre,
It's nothing but swathings—each smaller and smaller.—
Nature is witty! [*Throws the fragments away.*
The devil take brooding!
If one goes about thinking, one's apt to stumble.
Well, *I* can at any rate laugh at that danger;—
For here on all fours I am firmly planted.
[*Scratches his head.*
A queer enough business, the whole concern!
Life, as they say, plays with cards up its sleeve; [1]

[1] This and the following line, literally translated, run thus: "Life, as it's called, has a fox behind its ear. But when one grasps at him, Reynard takes to his heels." "To have a fox behind the ear" is a proverbial expression for insincerity, double-dealing.

But when one snatches at them, they've disappeared,
And one grips something else,—or else nothing at all.

[*He has come near to the hut; he catches sight of it and starts.*

This hut? On the heath——! Ha! [*Rubs his eyes.*
It seems exactly
As though I had known this same building before.—
The reindeer-horns jutting above the gable!—
A mermaid, shaped like a fish from the navel!—
Lies! there's no mermaid! But nails—and planks,-
Bars too, to shut out hobgoblin thoughts.—

SOLVEIG.

[*Singing in the hut.*]

Now all is ready for Whitsun Eve.
Dearest boy of mine, far away,
Comest thou soon?
Is thy burden heavy?
Take time, take time;—
I will await thee;
I promised of old.[1]

PEER.

[*Rises, quiet and deadly pale.*]

One that's remembered,—and one that's forgot.
One that has squandered,—and one that has saved.—
Oh, earnest!—and never can the game be played o'er!
Oh, dread![2]—h e r e was my Kaiserdom!

[*Hurries off along the wood path.*

[1] See footnote, p. 217. [2] See footnote, p. 259.

SCENE SIXTH

Night. A heath, with fir-trees. A forest fire has been raging; charred tree-trunks are seen stretching for miles White mists here and there clinging to the earth.
PEER GYNT *comes running over the heath.*

PEER.

Ashes, fog-scuds, dust wind-driven,—
Here's enough for building with!
Stench and rottenness within it;
All a whited sepulchre.
Figments, dreams, and still born knowledge
Lay the pyramid's foundation;
O'er them shall the work mount upwards,
With its step on step of falsehood.
Earnest shunned, repentance dreaded,
Flaunt at the apex, like a scutcheon,
Fill the trump of judgment with their:
"Petrus Gyntus Cæsar fecit!" [*Listens.*
What is this, like children's weeping?
Weeping, but half-way to song.—
Thread-balls [1] at my feet are rolling!—
[*Kicking at them.*
Off with you! You block my path!

THE THREAD-BALLS.

[*On the ground.*]

We are thoughts;
Thou shouldst have thought us;—
Feet to run on
Thou shouldst have given us!

[1] See Introduction.

PEER.

[*Going round about.*]

I have given life to o n e;—
'Twas a bungled, crook-legged thing!

THE THREAD-BALLS.

We should have soared up
Like clangorous voices,—
And here we must trundle
As grey-yarn thread-balls.

PEER.

[*Stumbling.*]

Thread-clue! you accursed scamp!
Would you trip your father's heels? [*Flees.*

WITHERED LEAVES.

[*Flying before the wind.*]

We are a watchword;
Thou shouldst have proclaimed us!
See how thy dozing
Has wofully riddled us.
The worm has gnawed us
In every crevice;
We have never twined us
Like wreaths round fruitage.

PEER.

Not in vain your birth, however;—
Lie but still and serve as manure.

A Sighing in the Air.

We are songs;
Thou shouldst have sung us!—
A thousand times over
Hast thou cowed us and smothered us
Down in thy heart's pit
We have lain and waited;—
We were never called forth.
Thy gorge we poison!

Peer.

Poison t h e e , thou foolish stave!
Had I time for verse and stuff? [*Attempts a short cut.*

Dewdrops.

[*Dripping from the branches.*]

We are tears
Unshed for ever.
Ice-spears, sharp-wounding,
We could have melted.
Now the barb rankles
In the shaggy bosom;—
The wound is closed over;
Our power is ended.

Peer.

Thanks;—I wept in Rondë-cloisters,—
None the less my tail-part smarted!

Broken Straws.

We are deeds;
Thou shouldst have achieved us!
Doubt, the throttler,

Has crippled and riven us.
On the Day of Judgment
We'll come a-flock,
And tell the story,—
Then woe to you!

PEER.

Rascal-tricks! How dare you debit
What is n e g a t i v e against me? [*Hastens away.*

ÅSE'S VOICE.

[*Far away.*]

Fie, what a post-boy!
Hu, you've upset me
Here in the slush, boy!
Sadly it's smirched me.—
You've driven me the wrong way.
Peer, where's the castle?
The Fiend has misled you
With the switch from the cupboard!

PEER.

Better haste away, poor fellow!
With the devil's sins upon you,
Soon you'll faint upon the hillside;—
Hard enough to bear one's own sins. [*Runs off.*

SCENE SEVENTH

Another part of the heath.

PEER GYNT.

[*Sings.*]

A sexton! A sexton! where are you, hounds?
A song from braying precentor-mouths;
Around your hat-brim a mourning band;—
My dead are many; I must follow their biers!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER, *with a box of tools and a large casting-ladle, comes from a side path.*

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Well met, old gaffer!

PEER.

Good evening, friend!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

The man's in a hurry. Why, where is he going?

PEER.

To a grave-feast.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Indeed? My sight's not very good;—
Excuse me,—your name doesn't chance to be Peer?

PEER.

Peer Gynt, as the saying is.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

That I call luck!
It's precisely Peer Gynt I am sent for to-night.

PEER.

You're sent for? What do you want?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Why, see here;
I mould buttons; and you must go into my ladle.

PEER.

What to do there?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

To be melted up.

PEER.

To be melted?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Here it is, empty and scoured.
Your grave is dug ready, your coffin bespoke.
The worms in your body will live at their ease;—
But I have orders, without delay,
On Master's behalf to fetch in your soul.

PEER.

It can't be! Like this, without any warning——!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

It's an old tradition at burials and births
To appoint in secret the day of the feast,
With no warning at all to the guest of honour.

PEER.

Ay, ay, that's true. All my brain's awhirl.
You are——?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Why, I told you—a button-moulder.

PEER.

I see! A pet child has many nicknames.
So that's it, Peer; it is t h e r e you're to harbour
But these, my good man, are most unfair proceedings!
I'm sure I deserve better treatment than this;—
I'm not nearly so bad as perhaps you think,—
Indeed I've done more or less good in the world;—
At worst you may call me a sort of a bungler,—
But certainly not an exceptional sinner.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Why that is precisely the rub, my man;
You're no sinner at all in the higher sense;
That's why you're excused all the torture-pangs,
And, like others, land in the casting-ladle.

PEER.

Give it what name you please—call it ladle or pool;[1]
Spruce ale and swipes, they are both of them beer.
Avaunt from me, Satan!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

You can't be so rude
As to take my foot for a horse's hoof?

[1] "Pöl," otherwise "Svovlpöl"—the sulphur pool of hell.

PEER.

On horse's hoof or on fox's claws [1]—
Be off; and be careful what you're about!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

My friend, you're making a great mistake.
We're both in a hurry, and so, to save time,
I'll explain the reason of the whole affair.
You are, with your own lips you told me so,
No sinner on the so-called heroic scale,—
Scarce middling even——

PEER.

Ah, now you're beginning
To talk common sense——

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Just have patience a bit—
But to call you a good man were going too far.—

PEER.

Well, you know I have never laid claim to that.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

You're nor one thing nor t'other then, only so-so.
A sinner of really grandiose style
Is nowadays not to be met on the highways.
It wants much more than merely to wallow in mire;
For both vigour and earnestness go to a sin.

[1] See footnote, p. 276.

PEER.

Ay, it's very true that remark of yours;
One has to lay on, like the old Berserkers.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

You, friend, on the other hand, took your sin lightly.

PEER.

Only outwardly, friend, like a splash of mud.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Ah, we'll soon be at one now. The sulphur pool
Is no place for you, who but plashed in the mire.

PEER.

And in consequence, friend, I may go as I came?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

No, in consequence, friend, I must melt you up.

PEER.

What tricks are these that you've hit upon
At home here, while I've been in foreign parts?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

The custom's as old as the Snake's creation;
It's designed to prevent loss of good material.
You've worked at the craft—you must know that often
A casting turns out, to speak plainly, mere dross;
The buttons, for instance, have sometimes no loop to them.
What did y o u do then?

PEER.

Flung the rubbish away.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Ah, yes; Jon Gynt was well known for a waster,
So long as he'd aught left in wallet or purse.
But Master, you see, he is thrifty, he is;
And that is why he's so well-to-do.
He flings nothing away as entirely worthless
That can be made use of as raw material.
Now, y o u were designed for a shining button
On the vest of the world; but your loop gave way;
So into the waste-box you needs must go,
And then, as they phrase it, be merged in the mass.

PEER.

You're surely not meaning to melt me up,
With Dick, Tom, and Hal,[1] into something new?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

That's just what I do mean, and nothing else.
We've done it already to plenty of folks.
At Kongsberg[2] they do just the same with coin
That's been current so long that its impress is lost.

PEER.

But this is the wretchedest miserliness!
My dear good friend, let me get off free;—
A loopless button, a worn out farthing,—
What is t h a t to a man in your Master's position?

[1] Literally, "With Peter and Paul."
[2] The Royal Mint is at Kongsberg, a town in southern Norway.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Oh, so long as, and seeing, the spirit is in you,
You always have value as so much metal.

PEER.

No, I say! No! With both teeth and claws
I'll fight against this! Sooner anything else!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

But what else? Come now, be reasonable.
You know you're not airy enough for heaven——

PEER.

I'm not hard to content; I don't aim so high;—
But I won't be deprived of one doit of my Self.
Have me judged by the law in the old-fashioned way!
For a certain time place me with Him of the Hoof;—
Say a hundred years, come the worst to the worst;
That, now, is a thing that one surely can bear;
They say that the torment is moral no more,
So it can't be so pyramid-like after all.
It is, as 'tis written, a mere transition;
And as the fox said: One waits; there comes
An hour of deliverance; one lives in seclusion,
And hopes in the meantime for happier days.—
But this other notion—to have to be merged,
Like a mote, in the carcass of some outsider,—
This casting-ladle business, this Gynt-cessation,—
It stirs up my innermost soul in revolt!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Bless me, my dear Peer, there is surely no need
To get so wrought up about trifles like this.

Yourself you never have been at all;—
Then what does it matter, your dying right out?

PEER.

Have *I* not been——? I could almost laugh!
Peer Gynt, then, has been something else, I suppose!
No, Button-moulder, you judge in the dark.
If you could but look into my very reins,
You'd find only Peer there, and Peer all through,—
Nothing else in the world, no, nor anything more.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

It's impossible. Here I have got my orders.
Look, here it is written: Peer Gynt shalt thou summon.
He has set at defiance his life's design;
Clap him into the ladle with other spoilt goods.

PEER.

What nonsense! They must mean some other person.
Is it really Peer? It's not Rasmus, or Jon?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

It is many a day since I melted them.
So come quietly now, and don't waste my time.

PEER.

I'll be damned if I do! Ay, 'twould be a fine thing
If it turned out to-morrow some one else was meant.
You'd better take care what you're at, my good man!
Think of the onus you're taking upon you——

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

I have it in writing——

PEER.

At least give me time!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

What good would that do you?

PEER.

I'll use it to prove
That I've been myself all the days of my life;
And that's the question that's in dispute.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

You'll prove it? And how?

PEER.

Why, by vouchers and witnesses.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

I'm sadly afraid Master will not accept them.

PEER.

Impossible! However, enough for the day[1]—!
My dear man, allow me a loan of myself;
I'll be back again shortly. One is born only once,
And oneself, as created, one fain would stick to.
Come, are we agreed?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Very well then, so be it.
But remember, we meet at the next cross-roads.

[PEER GYNT *runs off.*

[1] See footnote, p. 265.

SCENE EIGHTH

A further point on the heath.

PEER.

[*Running hard.*]

Time is money, as the Scripture says.
If I only knew where the cross-roads are;—
They may be near and they may be far.
The earth burns beneath me like red-hot iron.
A witness! A witness! Oh, where shall I find one?
It's almost unthinkable here in the forest.
The world is a bungle! A wretched arrangement,
When a right must be proved that is patent as day!

An OLD MAN, *bent with age, with a staff in his hand and a bag on his back, is trudging in front of him.*

THE OLD MAN.

[*Stops.*]

Dear, kind sir—a trifle to a houseless soul!

PEER.

Excuse me; I've got no small change in my pocket——

THE OLD MAN.

Prince Peer! Oh, to think we should meet again——!

PEER.

Who are you?

THE OLD MAN.

You forget the Old Man in the Rondë?

PEER.

Why, you're never——

THE OLD MAN.

The King of the Dovrë, my boy!

PEER.

The Dovrë-King? Really? The Dovrë-King? Speak!

THE OLD MAN.

Oh, I've come terribly down in the world——!

PEER.

Ruined?

THE OLD MAN.

Ay, plundered of every stiver!
Here am I tramping it, starved as a wolf.

PEER.

Hurrah! Such a witness doesn't grow on the trees.

THE OLD MAN.

My Lord Prince, too, has grizzled a bit since we met.

PEER.

My dear father-in-law, the years gnaw and wear one.—
Well well, a truce to all private affairs,—
And pray, above all things, no family jars.
I was then a sad madcap——

THE OLD MAN.

Oh yes; oh yes;—
His Highness was young; and what won't one do then?
But his Highness was wise in rejecting his bride.
He saved himself thereby both worry and shame.
For since then she's utterly gone to the bad——

PEER.

Indeed!

THE OLD MAN.

She has led a deplorable life;[1]
And, just think,—she and Trond are now living together.

PEER.

Which Trond?

THE OLD MAN.

Of the Valfjeld.

PEER.

It's he? Aha;
It was he I cut out with the sæter-girls.

THE OLD MAN.

But my grandson has shot up both stout and tall,
And has flourishing children all over the land——

PEER.

Now, my dear man, spare us this flow of words;—
I've something quite different troubling my mind.—

[1] "Hun gik nu for koldt vand og lud"—literally, "to live on cold water and lye"—to live wretchedly and be badly treated.

I've got into rather a ticklish position,
And am greatly in need of a witness or voucher;—
That's how you could help me best, father-in-law,
And I'll find you a trifle to drink my health.

THE OLD MAN.

You don't say so; can I be of use to his Highness?
You'll give me a character, then, in return?

PEER.

Most gladly. I'm somewhat hard pressed for cash,
And must cut down expenses in every direction.
Now hear what's the matter. No doubt you remember
That night when I came to the Rondë a-wooing——

THE OLD MAN.

Why, of course, my Lord Prince!

PEER.

Oh, no more of the Prince!
But no matter. You wanted, by sheer brute force,
To bias my sight, with a slit in the lens,
And to change me about from Peer Gynt to a troll.
What did *I* do then? I stood out against it,—
Swore I would stand on no feet but my own;
Love, power, and glory at once I renounced,
And all for the sake of remaining myself.
Now this fact, you see, you must swear to in Court——

THE OLD MAN.

No, I'm blest if I can.

PEER.

Why, what nonsense is this?

THE OLD MAN.

You surely don't want to compel me to lie?
You pulled on the troll-breeches, don't you remember,
And tasted the mead——

PEER.

Ay, you lured me seductively;—
But I flatly declined the decisive test,
And t h a t is the thing you must judge your man by.
It's the end of the ditty that all depends on.

THE OLD MAN.

But it ended, Peer, just in the opposite way.

PEER.

What rubbish is this?

THE OLD MAN.

When you left the Rondë,
You inscribed my motto upon your escutcheon.[1]

PEER.

What motto?

THE OLD MAN.

The potent and sundering word.

PEER.

The word?

[1] Literally, "Wrote my motto behind your ear."

THE OLD MAN.

That which severs the whole race of men
From the troll-folk: T r o l l ! T o t h y s e l f b e e n o u g h !

PEER.

[*Recoils a step.*]

E n o u g h !

THE OLD MAN.

And with every nerve in your body,
You've been living up to it ever since.

PEER.

What, I? Peer Gynt?

THE OLD MAN.

[*Weeps.*]

It's ungrateful of you!
You've lived as a troll, but have still kept it secret.
The word I taught you has shown you the way
To swing yourself up as a man of substance;—
And now you must needs come and turn up your nose
At me and the word you've to thank for it all.

PEER.

E n o u g h ! A hill-troll! An egoist!
This must be all rubbish; that's perfectly certain.

THE OLD MAN.

[*Pulls out a bundle of old newspapers.*]

I daresay you think we don't take in the papers?
Wait; here I'll show you in red and black [1]

[1] Clearly the troll-substitute for "in black and white."

How the "Bloksberg Post" eulogises you;
And the "Heklefjeld Journal" has done the same
Ever since the winter you left the country.—
Do you care to read them? You're welcome, Peer.
Here's an article, look you, signed "Stallion-hoof."
And here too is one: "On Troll-Nationalism."
The writer points out and lays stress on the truth
That horns and a tail are of little importance,
So long as one has but a strip of the hide.
"Our e n o u g h," he concludes, "gives the hall-mark
of trolldom
To man,"—and proceeds to cite you as an instance.

PEER.

A hill-troll? I?

THE OLD MAN.

Yes, that's perfectly clear.

PEER.

Might as well have stayed quietly where I was?
Might have stayed in the Rondë in comfort and peace?
Saved my trouble and toil and no end of shoe-leather?
Peer Gynt—a troll? Why, it's rubbish! It's stuff!
Good-bye! There's a halfpenny to buy you tobacco.

THE OLD MAN.

Nay, my good Prince Peer!

PEER.

Let me go! You're mad,
Or else doting. Off to the hospital with you!

THE OLD MAN.

Oh, that is exactly what I'm in search of.
But, as I told you, my grandson's offspring
Have become overwhelmingly strong in the land,
And they say that I only exist in books.
The saw says: One's kin are unkindest of all;
I've found to my cost that that saying is true.
It's cruel to count as mere figment and fable——

PEER.

My dear man, there are others who share the same fate.

THE OLD MAN.

And ourselves we've no Mutual Aid Society,
No alms-box or Penny Savings Bank;—
In the Rondë, of course, they'd be out of place.

PEER.

No, that curs'd: To thyself be enough was
the word there!

THE OLD MAN.

Oh, come now, the Prince can't complain of the word.
And if he could manage by hook or by crook——

PEER.

My man, you have got on the wrong scent entirely;
I'm myself, as the saying goes, fairly cleaned out [1]——

[1] Literally, "On a naked hill."

THE OLD MAN.

You surely can't mean it? His Highness a beggar?

PEER.

Completely. His Highness's ego's in pawn.
And it's all your fault, you accursëd trolls!
That's what comes of keeping bad company.

THE OLD MAN.

So there came my hope toppling down from its perch again!
Good-bye! I had best struggle on to the town——

PEER.

What would you do there?

THE OLD MAN.

I will go to the theatre.
The papers are clamouring for national talents——

PEER.

Good luck on your journey; and greet them from me.
If I can but get free, I will go the same way.
A farce I will write them, a mad and profound one;
It's name shall be: "Sic transit gloria mundi."

[*He runs off along the road; the* OLD MAN *shouts after him.*

SCENE NINTH

[*At a cross-road.*]

PEER GYNT.

Now comes the pinch, Peer, as never before!
This Dovrish E n o u g h has passed judgment upon you.
The vessel's a wreck; one must float with the spars.
All else; but to go to the scrap-heap—no, no!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

[*At the cross-road.*]

Well now, Peer Gynt, have you found your voucher?

PEER.

Is this, then, the cross-road? Well, that is short work!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

I can see on your face, as it were on a signboard,
The gist of the paper before I have read it.

PEER.

I got tired of the hunt;—one might lose one's way——

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Yes; and what does it lead to, after all?

PEER.

True enough; in the wood, and by night as well——

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

There's an old man, though, trudging. Shall we call him here?

PEER.

No, let him go. He is drunk, my dear fellow!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

But perhaps he might——

PEER.

Hush; no—let him alone!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Well, shall we begin then?

PEER.

One question—just one:
What is it, at bottom, this "being oneself"?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

A singular question, most odd in the mouth
Of a man who but now——

PEER.

Come, a straightforward answer.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

To be oneself is: to slay oneself.
But on you that answer is doubtless lost;

And therefore we'll say: to stand forth everywhere
With Master's intention displayed like a sign-board.

PEER.

But suppose a man never has come to know
What Master meant with him?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

He must d i v i n e it.

PEER.

But how oft are divinings beside the mark,—
Then one's carried "ad undas" [1] in middle career.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

That is certain, Peer Gynt; in default of divining
The cloven-hoofed gentleman finds his best hook

PEER.

This matter's excessively complicated.—
See here! I no longer plead being myself;—
It might not be easy to get it proven.
That part of my case I must look on as lost.
But just now, as I wandered alone o'er the heath,
I felt my conscience-shoe pinching me;
I said to myself: After all, you're a sinner——

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

You seem bent on beginning all over again——

[1] So in original.

PEER.

No, very far from it; a g r e a t one I mean;
Not only in deeds, but in words and desires.
I've lived a most damnable life abroad——

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Perhaps; I must ask you to show me the schedule!

PEER.

Well well, give me time; I will find out a parson,
Confess with all speed, and then bring you his voucher.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Ay, if you can bring me that, then it is clear
You may yet escape from the casting-ladle.
But, Peer, I'd my orders——

PEER.

The paper is old;
It dates no doubt from a long past period;—
At one time I lived with disgusting slackness,
Went playing the prophet, and trusted in Fate.
Well, may I try?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

But——!

PEER.

My dear, good man,
I'm sure you can't have so much to do.
Here, in this district, the air is so bracing,
It adds an ell to the people's ages.

Recollect what the Justedal parson wrote:
"It's seldom that any one dies in this valley."

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

To the next cross-roads then; but not a step further

PEER.

A priest I must catch, if it be with the tongs.
[*He starts running.*

SCENE TENTH

A heather-clad hillside with a path following the windings of the ridge.

PEER.

This may come in useful in many ways,
Said Esben as he picked up a magpie's wing.
Who could have thought one's account of sins
Would come to one's aid on the last night of all?
Well, whether or no, it's a ticklish business;
A move from the frying-pan[1] into the fire:—
But then there's a proverb of well-tried validity
Which says that as long as there's life there is hope.

A LEAN PERSON *in a priest's cassock, kilted-up high, and with a birding-net over his shoulder, comes hurrying along the ridge.*

PEER.

Who goes there? A priest with a fowling-net!
Hei, hop! I'm the spoilt child of fortune indeed!
Good evening, Herr Pastor! the path is bad——

[1] Literally, "the ashes."

THE LEAN ONE.

Ah yes; but what wouldn't one do for a soul?

PEER.

Aha! then there's some one bound heavenwards?

THE LEAN ONE.

No;
I hope he is taking a different road.

PEER.

May I walk with Herr Pastor a bit of the way?

THE LEAN ONE.

With pleasure; I'm partial to company.

PEER.

I should like to consult you——

THE LEAN ONE.

Heraus![1] Go ahead!

PEER.

You see here before you a good sort of man.
The laws of the state I have strictly observed,
Have made no acquaintance with fetters or bolts;—
But it happens at times that one misses one's footing
And stumbles——

THE LEAN ONE.

Ah yes; that occurs to the best of us.

[1] So in original.

PEER.

Now these trifles you see——

THE LEAN ONE.

Only trifles?

PEER.

Yes;
From sinning *en gros*[1] I have ever refrained.

THE LEAN ONE.

Oh then, my dear fellow, pray leave me in peace;—
I'm not the person you seem to think me.—
You look at my fingers? What see you in them?

PEER.

A nail-system somewhat extremely developed.

THE LEAN ONE.

And now? You are casting a glance at my feet?

PEER.

[*Pointing.*]
That's a natural hoof?

THE LEAN ONE.

So I flatter myself.

PEER.

[*Raises his hat.*]
I'd have taken my oath you were simply a parson;
And I find I've the honour——. Well, best is best;—

[1] So in original.

When the hall door stands wide,—shun the kitchen way;
When the king's to be met with,—avoid the lackey.

THE LEAN ONE.

Your hand! You appear to be free from prejudice.
Say on then, my friend; in what way can I serve you?
Now you mustn't ask me for wealth or power;
I couldn't supply them although I should hang for it.
You can't think how slack the whole business is;—
Transactions have dwindled most pitiably.
Nothing doing in souls; only now and again
A stray one——

PEER.

The race has improved so remarkably?

THE LEAN ONE.

No, just the reverse; it's sunk shamefully low;—
The majority end in a casting-ladle.

PEER.

Ah yes—I have heard that ladle mentioned;
In fact, 'twas the cause of my coming to you.

THE LEAN ONE.

Speak out!

PEER.

If it were not too much to ask,
I should like——

THE LEAN ONE.

A harbour of refuge? eh?

PEER.

You've guessed my petition before I have asked.
You tell me the business is going awry;
So I daresay you will not be over-particular.

THE LEAN ONE.

But, my dear——

PEER.

My demands are in no way excessive.
I shouldn't insist on a salary;
But treatment as friendly as things will permit.

THE LEAN ONE.

A fire in your room?

PEER.

Not too much fire;—and chiefly
The power of departing in safety and peace,—
The right, as the phrase goes, of freely withdrawing
Should an opening offer for happier days.

THE LEAN ONE.

My dear friend, I vow I'm sincerely distressed;
But you cannot imagine how many petitions
Of similar purport good people send in,
When they're quitting the scene of their earthly activity.

PEER.

But now that I think of my past career,
I feel I've an absolute claim to admission——

THE LEAN ONE.

'Twas but trifles, you said——

PEER.

In a certain sense;—
But, now I remember, I've trafficked in slaves——

THE LEAN ONE.

There are men that have trafficked in wills and souls,
But who bungled it so that they failed to get in.

PEER.

I've shipped Bramah-figures in plenty to China.

THE LEAN ONE.

Mere wish-wash again! Why, we laugh at such things.
There are people that ship off far gruesomer figures
In sermons, in art, and in literature,
Yet have to stay out in the cold——

PEER.

Ah, but then,
Do you know—I once went and set up as a prophet!

THE LEAN ONE.

In foreign parts? Humbug! Why most people's *Sehen Ins Blaue*[1] ends in the casting-ladle.
If you've no more than that to rely upon,
With the best of good will, I can't possibly house you.

[1] So in original.

PEER.

But hear this: In a shipwreck—I clung to a boat's keel,—
And it's written: A drowning man grasps at a straw,—
Furthermore it is written: You're nearest yourself,—
So I half-way divested a cook of his life.

THE LEAN ONE.

It were all one to me if a kitchen-maid
You had half-way divested of something else.
What sort of stuff is this half-way jargon,
Saving your presence? Who, think you, would care
To throw away dearly-bought fuel, in times
Like these, on such spiritless rubbish as this?
There now, don't be enraged; 'twas your sins that I scoffed at;
And excuse my speaking my mind so bluntly.—
Come, my dearest friend, banish this stuff from your head,[1]
And get used to the thought of the casting-ladle.
What would you gain if I lodged you and boarded you?
Consider; I know you're a sensible man.
Well, you'd keep your memory; that's so far true;—
But the retrospect o'er recollection's domain
Would be, both for heart and for intellect,
What the Swedes call "Mighty poor sport"[2] indeed.
You have nothing either to howl or to smile about;
No cause for rejoicing nor yet for despair;
Nothing to make you feel hot or cold;
Only a sort of a something to fret over.

PEER.

It is written: It's never so easy to know
Where the shoe is tight that one isn't wearing.

[1] Literally, "knock out that tooth."
[2] "Bra litet rolig."

THE LEAN ONE.

Very true; I have—praise be to so-and-so!—
No occasion for more than a single odd shoe.
But it's lucky we happened to speak of shoes;
It reminds me that I must be hurrying on;—
I'm after a roast that I hope will prove fat;
So I really mustn't stand gossiping here.—

PEER.

And may one inquire, then, what sort of sin-diet
The man has been fattened on?

THE LEAN ONE.

I understand
He has been himself both by night and by day,
And that, after all, is the principal point.

PEER.

Himself? Then do such folks belong to your parish?

THE LEAN ONE.

That depends; the door, at least, stands ajar for them
Remember, in two ways a man can be
Himself—there's a right and wrong side to the jacket.
You know they have lately discovered in Paris
A way to take portraits by help of the sun.
One can either produce a straightforward picture,
Or else what is known as a negative one.
In the latter the lights and the shades are reversed,
And they're apt to seem ugly to commonplace eyes;
But for all that the likeness is latent in them,
And all you require is to bring it out.

If, then, a soul shall have pictured itself
In the course of its life by the negative method,
The plate is not therefore entirely cashiered,—
But without more ado they consign it to me.
For ulterior treatment I take it in hand,
And by suitable methods effect its development.
I steam it, I dip it, I burn it, I scour it,
With sulphur and other ingredients like that,
Till the image appears which the plate was designed for,—
That, namely, which people call positive.
But for one who, like you, has smudged himself out,
Neither sulphur nor potash avails in the least.

PEER.

I see; one must come to you black as a raven
To turn out a white ptarmigan? Pray what's the name
Inscribed 'neath the negative counterfeit
That you're now to transfer to the positive side?

THE LEAN ONE.

The name's Peter[1] Gynt.

PEER.

Peter Gynt? Indeed?
Is Herr Gynt himself?

THE LEAN ONE.

Yes, he vows he is.

PEER.

Well, he's one to be trusted, that same Herr Peter.

[1] So in original.

THE LEAN ONE.

You know him, perhaps?

PEER.

Oh yes, after a fashion;—
One knows all sorts of people.

THE LEAN ONE.

I'm pressed for time;
Where saw you him last?

PEER.

It was down at the Cape.

THE LEAN ONE.

Di Buona Speranza?

PEER.

Just so; but he sails
Very shortly again, if I'm not mistaken.

THE LEAN ONE.

I must hurry off then without delay.
I only hope I may catch him in time!
That Cape of Good Hope—I could never abide it;—
It's ruined by missionaries from Stavanger.
[*He rushes off southwards.*

PEER.

The stupid hound! There he takes to his heels
With his tongue lolling out. He'll be finely sold,

It delights me to humbug an ass like that.
He to give himself airs, and to lord it forsooth!
He's a mighty lot, truly, to swagger about!
He'll scarcely grow fat at his present trade;—
He'll soon drop from his perch with his whole apparatus.—
H'm, I'm not over-safe in the saddle either;
I'm expelled, one may say, from s e l f-owning nobility.[1]

[*A shooting star is seen; he nods after it.*

Greet all friends from Peer Gynt, Brother Starry-Flash!
To flash forth, to go out, and be nought at a gulp—

[*Pulls himself together as though in terror, and goes deeper in among the mists; stillness for a while; then he cries:*

Is there no one, no one in all the whirl,—
In the void no one, and no one in heaven—!

[*He comes forward again further down, throws his hat upon the ground, and tears at his hair. By degrees a stillness comes over him.*

So unspeakably poor, then, a soul can go
Back to nothingness, into the grey of the mist.
Thou beautiful earth, be not angry with me
That I trampled thy grasses to no avail.
Thou beautiful sun, thou hast squandered away
Thy glory of light in an empty hut.
There was no one within it to hearten and warm;—
The owner, they tell me, was never at home.
Beautiful sun and beautiful earth,
You were foolish to bear and give light to my mother.
The spirit is niggard and nature lavish;
And dearly one pays for one's birth with one's life.—
I will clamber up high, to the dizziest peak;

[1] "*Selv*ejer-Adlen." "Selvejer" (literally, "self-owner") means a freeholder, as opposed to a "husmand" or tenant. There is of course a play upon words in the original.

I will look once more on the rising sun,
Gaze till I'm tired o'er the promised land;
Then try to get snowdrifts piled up over me.
They can write above them: "Here N o O n e lies buried";
And afterwards,—then——! Let things go as they can.

CHURCH-GOERS.

[*Singing on the forest path.*]

Oh, morning thrice blest,
When the tongues of God's kingdom
Struck the earth like to flaming steel!
From the earth to his dwelling
Now the heirs' song ascendeth
In the tongue of the kingdom of God.

PEER.

[*Crouches as in terror.*]

Never look there! t h e r e all's desert and waste.—
I fear I was dead long before I died.

[*Tries to slink in among the bushes, but comes upon the cross-roads.*

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Good morning, Peer Gynt! Where's the list of your sins?

PEER.

Do you think that I haven't been whistling and shouting
As hard as I could?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

And met no one at all?

PEER.

Not a soul but a tramping photographer.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Well, the respite is over.

PEER.

Ay, everything's over.
The owl smells the daylight. Just list to the hooting!

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

It's the matin-bell ringing——

PEER.

[*Pointing.*]

What's that shining yonder?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Only light from a hut.

PEER.

And that wailing sound——?

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

But a woman singing.

PEER.

Ay, there—there I'll find
The list of my sins——

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

[*Seizing him.*]

Set your house in order!

[*They have come out of the underwood, and are standing near the hut. Day is dawning.*

PEER.

Set my house in order? It's there! Away.
Get you gone! Though your ladle were huge as a coffin,
It were too small, I tell you, for me and my sins.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Well, to the third cross-road, Peer; but then——.

[*Turns aside and goes.*

PEER.

[*Approaches the hut.*]

Forward and back, and it's just as far.
Out and in, and it's just as strait. [*Stops.*
No!—like a wild, an unending lament,
Is the thought: to come back, to go in, to go home.

[*Takes a few steps on, but stops again.*

Round about, said the Boyg!

[*Hears singing in the hut.*

Ah no; this time at least
Right through, though the path may be never so strait!

[*He runs towards the hut; at the same moment* SOLVEIG *appears in the doorway, dressed for church, with a psalm-book wrapped in a kerchief, and a staff in her hand. She stands there erect and mild.*

PEER.

[*Flings himself down on the threshold.*]

Hast thou doom for a sinner, then speak it forth!

SOLVEIG.

He is here! He is here! Oh, to God be the praise!
[*Stretches out her arms as though groping for him.*

PEER.

Cry out all my sins and my trespasses!

SOLVEIG.

In nought hast thou sinned, oh my own only boy.
[*Gropes for him again, and finds him.*

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

[*Behind the house.*]

The sin-list, Peer Gynt?

PEER.

Cry aloud my crime!

SOLVEIG.

[*Sits down beside him.*]

Thou hast made all my life as a beautiful song.
Blessëd be thou that at last thou hast come!
Blessëd, thrice blessëd our Whitsun-morn meeting!

PEER.

Then I am lost!

SOLVEIG.

There is one that rules all things.

PEER.

[*Laughs.*]

Lost! Unless thou canst answer riddles.

SOLVEIG.

Tell me them.

PEER.

Tell them! Come on! To be sure!
Canst thou tell where Peer Gynt has been since we parted?

SOLVEIG.

Been?

PEER.

With his destiny's seal on his brow;
Been, as in God's thought he first sprang forth!
Canst thou tell me? If not, I must get me home,—
Go down to the mist-shrouded regions.

SOLVEIG.

[*Smiling.*]

Oh, that riddle is easy.

PEER.

Then tell what thou knowest!
Where was I, as myself, as the whole man, the true man?
Where was I, with God's sigil upon my brow?

SOLVEIG.

In my faith, in my hope, and in my love.[1]

PEER.

[*Starts back.*]

What sayest thou——? Peace! These are juggling words.
Thou art mother thyself to the man that's there.

SOLVEIG.

Ay, that I am; but who is his father?
Surely he that forgives at the mother's prayer.

PEER.

[*A light shines in his face; he cries:*]

My mother; my wife; oh, thou innocent woman!—
In thy love—oh, there hide me, hide me!
[*Clings to her and hides his face in her lap. A long silence. The sun rises.*

SOLVEIG.

[*Sings softly.*]

Sleep thou, dearest boy of mine!
I will cradle thee, I will watch thee——

The boy has been sitting on his mother's lap.
They two have been playing all the life-day long.

[1] "I min Tro, i mit Håb og i min Kjærlighed."

We have entirely sacrificed the metre of the line, feeling it impossible to mar its simplicity by any padding. "Kjærlighed" also means "charity," in the biblical sense.

The boy has been resting at his mother's breast
All the life-day long. God's blessing on my joy.

The boy has been lying close in to my heart,
All the life-day long. He is weary now.

Sleep thou, dearest boy of mine!
I will cradle thee, I will watch thee.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER'S VOICE.

[*Behind the house.*]

At the last cross-road we will meet again, Peer;
And t h e n we'll see whether——; I say no more.

SOLVEIG.

[*Sings louder in the full daylight.*]

I will cradle thee, I will watch thee;
Sleep and dream thou, dear my boy!

THE END.

APPENDIX

[The stories of Peer Gynt and Gudbrand Glesnë both occur in Asbjörnsen's "Reindeer-hunting in the Rondë Hills"(*Norske Huldre-Eventyr og Folkesagn*, Christiania, 1848). They are told by the peasant guides or gillies who accompany a shooting-party into the mountains—the first by Peer Fugleskjelle, the second by Thor Ulvsvolden. Our translation of Asbjörnsen's "Peer Gynt" is based on Mr. H. L. Brækstad's version, published in *Round the Yule Log*, London, 1881.]

PEER GYNT

In the old days there lived in Kvam a hunter, whose name was Peer Gynt. He was always up in the mountains shooting bears and elks; for in those days there were more forests on the mountains to harbour such wild beasts. One time, late in the autumn, long after the cattle had been driven home, Peer set out for the hills. Every one had left the uplands except three sæter-girls. When Peer came up towards Hövring, where he was to pass the night in a sæter, it was so dark that he could not see his fist before him, and the dogs fell to barking and baying so that it was quite uncanny. All of a sudden he ran against something, and when he put his hand out he felt it was cold and slippery and big. Yet he did not seem to have strayed from the road, so he couldn't think what this could be; but unpleasant it was at any rate.

"Who is it?" asked Peer, for he felt it moving.

"Oh, it's the Boyg," [1] was the answer.

Peer was no wiser for this, but skirted along it for a bit, thinking that somewhere he must be able to pass. Suddenly he ran against something again, and when he put out his hand, it too was big, and cold, and slippery.

"Who is it?" asked Peer Gynt.

"Oh, it's the Boyg," was the answer again.

"Well, straight or crooked, you'll have to let me pass," said Peer; for he understood that he was walking in a ring, and that

[1] See footnote, p. 25.

the Boyg had curled itself round the sæter. Thereupon it shifted a little, so that Peer got past. When he came inside the sæter it was no lighter there than outside. He was feeling along the wall for a place to hang up his gun and his bag; but as he was groping his way forward he again felt something cold, and big, and slippery.

"Who is it?" shouted Peer.

"Oh, it's the great Boyg," was the answer. Wherever he put his hands out or tried to get past, he felt the Boyg encircling him.

"It's not very pleasant to be here," thought Peer, "since this Boyg is both out and in; but I think I can make short work of the nuisance."

So he took his gun and went out again, groping his way till he found the creature's head.

"What are you?" asked Peer.

"Oh, I am the big Boyg from Etnedale," said the Troll-Monster. Peer did not lose a moment, but fired three shots right into its head.

"Fire another," said the Boyg. But Peer knew better; if he had fired another shot, the bullet would have rebounded against himself.

Thereupon Peer and his dogs took hold of the Troll-Monster and dragged him out, so that they could get into the sæter. Meanwhile there was jeering and laughing in all the hills around.

"Peer Gynt dragged hard, but the dogs dragged harder," said a voice.

Next morning he went out stalking. When he came out on the uplands he saw a girl, who was calling some sheep up a hillside. But when he came to the place the girl was gone and the sheep too, and he saw nothing but a great flock of bears.

"Well, I never saw bears in a flock before," thought Peer to himself. When he came nearer, they had all disappeared except one.

"Look after your pig:
Peer Gynt is out
with his gun so big,"[1]

shouted a voice over in a hillock.

[1] Literally, "with his tail." A gun loosely slung over the shoulder bears a certain resemblance to a tail sticking up in the air.

"Oh, it'll be a bad business for Peer, but not for my pig; for he hasn't washed himself to-day," said another voice in the hill. Peer washed his hands with the water he had, and shot the bear. There was more laughter and jeering in the hill.

"You should have looked after your pig!" cried a voice.

"I didn't remember he had a water-jug between his legs," answered the other.

Peer skinned the bear and buried the carcass among the stones, but the head and the hide he took with him. On his way home he met a fox.

"Look at my lamb, how fat it is," said a voice in a hill.

"Look at that gun[1] of Peer's, how high it is," said a voice in another hill, just as Peer took aim and shot the fox. He skinned the fox and took the skin with him, and when he came to the sæter he put the heads on the wall outside, with their jaws gaping. Then he lighted a fire and put a pot on to boil some soup, but the chimney smoked so terribly that he could scarcely keep his eyes open, and so he had to set wide a small window. Suddenly a Troll came and poked his nose in through the window; it was so long that it reached across the room to the fireplace.

"Here's a proper snout for you to see," said the Troll.

"And here's proper soup for you to taste," said Peer Gynt; and he poured the whole potful of soup over the Troll's nose. The Troll ran away howling; but in all the hills around there was jeering and laughing and voices shouting—

"Soup-snout Gyri! Soup-snout Gyri!"

All was quiet now for a while; but before long there was a great noise and hubbub outside again. Peer looked out and saw that there was a cart there, drawn by bears. They hoisted up the Troll-Monster, and carted him away into the mountain. Just then a bucket of water came down the chimney and put out the fire, so that Peer was left in the dark. Then a jeering and laughing began in all the corners of the room, and a voice said—

"It'll go no better with Peer now than with the sæter-girls at Vala."

Peer made up the fire again, took his dogs with him, shut up the house, and set off northward to the Vala sæter, where the three girls were. When he had gone some distance he saw such a glare of light that it seemed to him the sæter must be on fire.

[1] Literally, "tail."

Just then he came across a pack of wolves; some of them he shot; and some he knocked on the head. When he came to the Vala sæter he found it pitch dark; there was no sign of any fire; but there were four strangers in the house carrying on with the sæter-girls. They were four Hill-Trolls, and their names were Gust of Værë, Tron of the Valfjeld, Tjöstöl Aabakken, and Rolf Eldförpungen. Gust of Værë was standing at the door to keep watch, while the others were in with the girls courting. Peer fired at Gust, but missed him, and Gust ran away. When Peer came inside he found the Trolls carrying on desperately with the girls. Two of the girls were terribly frightened and were saying their prayers, but the third, who was called Mad Kari, wasn't afraid; she said they might come there for all she cared; she would like to see what stuff there was in such fellows. But when the Trolls found that Peer was in the room they began to howl, and told Eldförpungen to make up the fire. At that instant the dogs set upon Tjöstöl and pulled him over on his back into the fireplace, so that the ashes and sparks flew up all round him.

"Did you see my snakes, Peer?" asked Tron of the Valfjeld—that was what he called the wolves.

"You shall go the same way as your snakes," said Peer, and shot him; and then he killed Aabakken with the butt-end of his rifle. Eldförpungen had escaped up the chimney. After this Peer took the girls back to their homes, for they didn't dare to stay any longer up at the sæter.

Shortly before Christmas-time Peer set out again. He had heard of a farm on the Dovrefjeld which was invaded by such a number of Trolls every Christmas-eve that the people of the farm had to turn out and get shelter with some of their neighbours. He was anxious to go there, for he was very keen upon the Trolls. He dressed himself in some old ragged clothes, and took with him a tame white bear that he had, as well as an awl, some pitch, and waxed twine. When he came to the farm he went in and begged for houseroom.

"God help us!" said the farmer; "we can't put you up. We have to clear out of the house ourselves, for every blessëd Christmas-eve the whole place is full of Trolls."

But Peer Gynt said he thought he should be able to clear the house of Trolls; and then he got leave to stay, and they gave him a pig's skin into the bargain. The bear lay down behind the fireplace, and Peer took out his awl, and pitch, and twine, and set to

making a big shoe, that took the whole pig's skin. He put a strong rope in for laces, so that he could pull the shoe tight together at the top; and he had a couple of handspikes ready.

All of a sudden the Trolls came, with a fiddle and a fiddler; some began dancing, while others fell to eating the Christmas fare on the table; some fried bacon, and some fried frogs and toads, and other disgusting things: these were the Christmas dainties they had brought with them. In the meantime some of the Trolls found the shoe Peer had made; they thought it must be for a very big foot. Then they all wanted to try it on; and when each of them had put a foot into it, Peer tightened the rope, shoved one of the handspikes into it, and twisted it up till they were all stuck fast in the shoe.

Just then the bear put his nose out and smelt the fry.

"Will you have a sausage, white pussy?" said one of the Trolls, and threw a red-hot frog right into the bear's jaws.

"Claw and smite, Bruin!" said Peer Gynt.

And then the bear got into such a rage that he rushed at the Trolls and smote and clawed them all, and Peer Gynt took the other handspike and hammered away at them as if he wanted to beat their brains out. So the Trolls had to clear out, and Peer stayed and enjoyed himself on the Christmas cheer the whole feast-time. After that the Trolls were not heard of again for many years. The farmer had a light-coloured mare, and Peer advised him to breed from her, and let her foals in their turn run and breed among the hills there.

Many years afterwards, about Christmas-time, the farmer was out in the forest cutting wood for the feast-time, when a Troll came towards him and shouted—

"Have you got that big white pussy of yours yet?"

"Yes, she's at home behind the stove," said the farmer; "and she' s got seven kittens now, much bigger and fiercer than herself."

"We'll never come to you any more, then," shouted the Troll.

"That Peer Gynt was a strange one," said Anders. "He was such an out-and-out tale-maker and yarn-spinner, you couldn't have helped laughing at him. He always made out that he himself had been mixed up in all the stories that people said had happened in the olden times."

GUDBRAND GLESNË

"THERE was a hunter in the West-Hills," said Thor Ulvsvolden, "called Gudbrand Glesnë. He was married to the grandmother of the lad you saw at the sæter yesterday evening, and a first-rate hunter they say he was. One autumn he came across a huge buck. He shot at it, and from the way it fell he couldn't tell but that it was stone dead. So he went up to it, and, as one often does, seated himself astride on its back, and was just drawing his knife to cleave the neck-bone from the skull. But no sooner had he sat down than up it jumped, threw its horns back, and jammed him down between them, so that he was fixed as in an arm-chair. Then it rushed away; for the bullet had only grazed the beast's head, so that it had fallen in a swoon. Never any man had such a ride[1] as that Gudbrand had. Away they went in the teeth of the wind, over the ugliest glaciers and moraines. Then the beast dashed along the Gjende-edge; and now Gudbrand prayed to the Lord, for he thought he would never see sun or moon again. But at last the reindeer took to the water and swam straight across with the hunter on its back. By this time he had got his knife drawn, and the moment the buck set foot on shore he plunged it into its neck, and it dropped dead. But you may be sure Gudbrand Glesnë wouldn't have taken that ride again, not for all the riches in the world.

"I have heard a story like that in England, about a deer-stalker that became a deer-rider," said Sir Tottenbroom.[2]

"Bliecher, in Jutland, tells a similar one," I said.

"But what sort of a place was this Gjender-edge you spoke of, Thor?" he interrupted me.

"Gjende-edge, you mean?" asked Thor. "It's the ridge[3] of a mountain lying between the Gjende-lakes, and so horribly narrow and steep that if you stand on it and drop a stone from each hand, they will roll down into the lakes, one on each side. The reindeer-hunters go over it in fine weather, otherwise it's impassable; but there was a devil of a fellow up in Skiager—Ole Store-

[1] "Skyds"—conveyance.

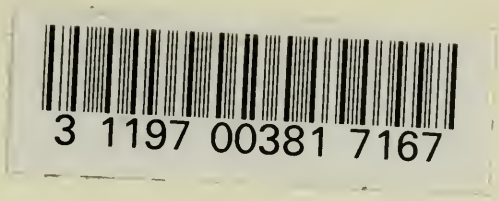
[2] An English sportsman who accompanied Asbjörnsen on his rambles.

[3] "Rygge"—backbone, *arête*.

bråten was his name—who went over it carrying a full-sized reindeer on his shoulders."

"How high is it above the lakes?" asked Sir Tottenbroom.

"Oh, it's not nearly so high as the Rondë-hills," said Thor. "But it's over seven hundred ells high."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